Table of Contents

1. Prologue
2. 1: Eternal Prison
3. 2: A Short Forever
4. 3: Pointlessly Endless
5. 4: Legends until the End of Time
6. 5: Unending Dread
7. 6: Memories from an Eternity Ago
8. 7: Hello Dear
9. 8: Abandoned Millenia
10. 9: A Thousand Years of Darkness
11. 10: Timeless Kingdom
12. 11: Shattered Chain
13. 12: Eternal Prison
14. 13: A Child... No!
15. 14: The Coin Never Landed at All
16. 15: Internal Screaming
17. 16: External Screaming
18. 17: Hidden Agenda
19. 18: A Way Out
20. 19: Truth
21. Epilogue

Prologue

Easy. Too easy.

Too easy to fool them. Too easy to convince them. Too easy to prove his love was real. Too easy to make them love him back. Too easy to get them to stay.

But it was hard to protect them the way he wanted to.

That was how he felt anyway.

For them it was always a kind and caring friend who wanted to prove so desperately how much he needed them in his life, something they never understood.

They never understood the way he snapped at them when they spoke poorly of themself; the way he would put them above everything else (even when something clearly more important needed his attention); they never understood why he was always there for them, be it a shoulder to cry on or a gentle, loving embrace.

Sure, he was a bit overprotective and maybe a bit obviously manipulative at times... but he never hurt them... so clearly he was doing those things because he didn't want them to find out about something he knew would hurt them.
The things he hid from them were never really that important anyways. Someone else would usually tell them, and it would never turn into a big deal because it was never something to confront him about hiding. Typically it would just be that some random cookie of importance was visiting and he had to make a public appearance with them, or something they could've sworn they put in one place would turn up in a completely different one.

They barely knew anyone outside his castle, even the other Great Heroes who would visit on diplomatic and... well Hollyberry Cookie is in her own category.

Maybe White Lily Cookie is too, but not really... they really considered her more as "inside" the castle... specifically because she always stayed there when she came to visit the kingdom.

But their favorite time was the mornings. Not because they liked getting up, but because if they were up enough time before him they could go do what they do best through the town.

While (C/F) Cookie wasn't exceptionally skilled at protecting themself. They didn't have magic, they weren't very tough, and their wimpy little arms would probably crumble right off if they tried to lift a weapon. But if there was one thing they could do, it was run.

"Excuse me!" They yell in a cheerful tone, zooming through the halls at high speeds.
They probably had thirty seconds before he caught up to them and if they wanted to at least get a lap in before he dragged them around at his painstakingly slow pace on their morning walk together.

The castle guards and servants move out of their way as they speeded past, a few laughing and yelling "good morning" after them.

Reaching the front gates they place their hand on them, about to push them open when a familiar spell catches them round the leg and lifts them off the ground.

"Good morning (C/F) Cookie." Pure Vanilla Cookie calmly walks up behind them, even his staff was smiling (and probably laughing at how silly they looked while dangling from their leg).

"Hey! Unfair! Put me down, Pure Vanilla Cookie!" They squirm, trying to free themself of the spell.

"Hmm..." he pretends to think about it, "No."

They sputter, trying to flip themself over to gape at him better.

"Haha, alright dear. But please don't go sprinting off. I don't want you to hurt yourself." He gently pulls them over and drops them in

his arms before setting them down.

"Yeah yeah... I learned my lesson after that cookie knocked me into the river." (C/F) Cookie rolls their eyes.

"Did you?" Pure Vanilla Cookie asks jokingly.

"Indeed I did, *your highness*." They mock, crossing their arms in a childish manner.

"If you insist." His smile doesn't falter as he opens his eyes for a moment to taunt them further. "Why don't we get going on our walk then?" He firmly takes their hand.

"Ok."

He opens the gates and leads the way out into the town.

"Did you sleep well?" Pure Vanilla Cookie asks them, "I know you've been waking up increasingly early to try and beat me outside for a run."

"Because you're so slow!" They whine, not answering his initial question, "I mean, sure, after the time I got all soggy I can understand why you're a bit hesitant to let me go out alone, but you know that something like that is never going to happen again!"

"I don't." He frowns, "That's what worries me... what if something happens to you and I'm not around to help you?"

"I may not be as powerful as you are, but I'm not completely helpless." They shrug.

He stares at them expectantly.

"I can still run away like a pro. You know there's nothing faster than me!" They boast.

"(C/F) Cookie." Pure Vanilla Cookie stops in the town square, where the bustle of the early morning rush was all around them, "I know you have so much confidence, but that doesn't mean I don't worry."

"You worry too much." They tell him, then feel his grip on their hand tighten painfully.

"At times I wonder if I don't worry enough!" He uses his grip on their hand to pull them closer to him, "I love you, and I don't want something to happen to you because of my carelessness."

They hold back a counter argument to his words, silently allowing him to stroke their cheek with his other hand, the one not holding theirs. They don't want to start an argument in the middle of the street.
They frown angrily as his staff pats their head.

Pure Vanilla Cookie laughs. "Now, why don't we finish our walk."

They huff as he continues to lead the way through the town, waving to every cookie who passes, which serves as encouragement for (C/F) Cookie to do the same.

Returning to the castle, he carefully closes the gates behind them.

"Now, why don't we go get you breakfast?" He smiles.

"Did you already eat?" They ask as he leads the way through the halls to the kitchen.

He doesn't answer.

"Pure Vanilla Cookie...?" They try to press the subject.

"Yes dear?" He turns to them, seeming to have forgotten.

"I asked if you had eaten yet..." They repeat.

"Oh, don't worry about me, dear."

"Are you too busy to stay for breakfast?" They put the pieces together.

Pure Vanilla Cookie sighs, "I'm afraid I am... I'm sorry (C/F) Cookie..."

"No, that's ok! I understand..." They quickly raise their hands in surrender.
Why hadn't he wanted to tell them?

"I'm sorry dear, but with all the chaos of diplomacy I'm afraid I am indeed required elsewhere. I assure you I would rather spend the time with you." He takes their hand, which he had let go of once they entered the palace gates, and lays a kiss atop it.

"Like I said, I understand." They do their best to fake a smile. "You are the king after all."

Usually this wasn't such a big deal, but had been happening more frequently recently and, regardless of assurance, it felt a lot more as though he didn't want them here at all.
It's not like he doesn't have a history of lying...

"How about this?" Pure Vanilla Cookie clearly recognizes the sadness in their features, "I will ensure my schedule gets cleared so we can at least have lunch together. It would be nice to see you after all the debates and politics."

The two share a laugh.

"Alright." They smile.

"I love you." He places a kiss on their cheek, "Stay safe, alright?"

"Ok." They watch him leave the kitchen.

"So..." the head chef, who had clearly been waiting for them to finish and the king to leave, speaks up from beside the counter, "I take it you're going to ignore your hunger and head straight back up to your room again."

"Probably, sorry..." (C/F) Cookie sighs.

"Nah, it's fine. I didn't start making anything because I kind of assumed." The chef laughs, "It hasn't gotten me fired... (yet)."

"What?"

"Nothing!"

"Oh, ok..." (C/F) Cookie frowns at the floor.

"You do know he'd be furious to find out you're skipping breakfast? I mean... I'm glad I'm the only one assigned to you. Not only does it keep my day occupied, but somewhat clear, but his highness doesn't scare me into silence whenever I feel I have to lie to him."

"Yeah..." They shudder, remembering the last time they had seen Pure Vanilla Cookie get angry. "Wait, you have to wh—?"

"Well, I should go make sure all the cooks are on task. Be down here by lunchtime!" They hurry off.

(C/F) Cookie tries to hold a cheerful facade as they walk back to their bedroom, but everyone knows them well enough to know they only walk when something is on their mind... or well... the second reason has been vaguely explained already.

Closing and locking their bedroom door, they look out the window —one that does not open.

Pure Vanilla Cookie seemed so distant and stressed lately... Their morning walks are almost all the time they spend together now... even there it's not exactly an ideal setting to have a heart-to-heart conversation, one where he would shower them in love like he did when they were alone together.

They understood though... every cookie was busy... every other cookie in this castle had a task, a use...

Honestly, why were they even there? They weren't strong, they didn't have skills that would be able to assist anyone with anything, all it felt like they did was waste other cookie's time and energy. It felt like they were just... in the way of more important matters. An obstacle in the way of every cookie's progress.

Sighing, they close the curtains and get into their bed, unaware how they were sniffling and crying. Eating probably would've helped stop this... but it's a bit late for that now. The king would be fuming if he saw them with this expression, or heard that they were upset.

It's possible they fell asleep because it seemed like no time at all before a gentle knock echoed through the room.

"Dear? Are you in here?" Pure Vanilla Cookie calls through the door. "(C/F) Cookie, open the door."

They start to panic. He'd be furious if he saw them like this. They take a few deep breaths and try to pull themself together enough to not have a tremor in their voice.
"Uh, no?"

"(C/F) Cookie..." Oh. He's already mad. He's just doing an incredible job at hiding it. "(C/F) Cookie that was not a request."

Getting up, they open the curtains, allowing sunlight to flood into the room, momentarily blinding them. "Alright." They hope their voice didn't sound as afraid as they felt.

Opening the door, they fearfully stand behind it, hoping that it would shield them from whatever reprimand was to come of whatever had made him upset.

"Dear..." He lays a hand on their cheek, "Are you ok?"

"Uh, yeah." They lie, already knowing that he knew this was false. They also already know that he was not going to drop this, unlike what they tried to do when he obviously lied.

He opens his eyes, staring very seriously at their face. "I... don't believe you." Inviting himself into the room and gently closing the door behind him, removing their only shield. Pure Vanilla Cookie pulls them into a side hug, leading them over to the bed and prompting them to sit on the edge. "Do you not want to talk about it?"

"No." They sigh. The real answer was 'not with you' but that would sound too suspicious.

"You know you can tell me anything right?" He says.

They mumble to themself, "it certainly doesn't feel that way..."

"Dear." His matter-of-fact tone meant he obviously heard them, "I love you, and I don't want you hiding things from me. I'd do anything for you, (C/F) Cookie."

"Well it feels like I can't do anything for you Pure Vanilla Cookie... you're a figure of legends... and I'm just... here." They try to shove him away from them, only for him to pull them into his lap.

"Well maybe that's enough for me. To have you bring a sense of normalcy to my life. You're not boring or uniform. You don't grovel and beg for my respect. You're you, and even if you don't think that's very much, it's a lot to me." He smiles. His scent was sweet, with sugary vanilla giving him a kind aura.

"Thanks..." they mumble, embarrassed by his words.

"Anytime dear." He shifts awkwardly, "Do... Do you want a kiss?"

His bashful way of asking made their heart scream at how cute it was.
"Sure?"

Come to think of it, they had been together so long... had they ever kissed him?
He's so giving with kisses on their cheeks and forehead, but they always felt embarrassed to return them due to his social status and... air of power.

And now they know why.

While he smells sweet and kindly, a cookie with a pure heart, the taste that met them was bitter and almost sour. Sure, there was a pinch of sweetness from sugar, but the unusual taste lingered, long after he pulled away.

"Oh." He becomes even more bashful at their expression. "Am I that bad at that?"

"No..."
Actually, aside from the odd, lasting taste of vanilla, it was rather pleasant.
They blush, avoiding his gaze.

"Come on, let's go get lunch." He helps them off the bed, standing up himself.

Unfortunately, their train of thought is cut off by their stomach betraying them. It rumbles loudly, too explicitly to mean anything but the truth.

"Dear..." Pure Vanilla Cookie stares at their face, as if asking for an explanation.

"Yes?" They answer quickly.

"Did you eat breakfast this morning?"

"Um, yes?" (C/F) Cookie laughs, smiling nervously.

"Oh really? What did you have?"

The one question that definitely shouldn't have cornered them, but did.

"Dear?" Pure Vanilla Cookie frowns.

"Uh, yeah, let's just go down to lunch." (C/F) Cookie laughs awkwardly, hurrying out of the room.

Pure Vanilla Cookie grumbles at their lack of response, assuming the correct answer.
"Perhaps I need to take more careful steps to ensure they take care of their health."

[so this is the end of the oneshot idea I originally had, then this scene for a scenario like this one popped up afterwards... so I was like, I'll just continue it!]

1: Eternal Prison

"Ok, this feels really unnecessary." (C/F) Cookie attempts to rip their arm from the king's grasp as he dragged them through the forest.

"Dear, I fear that war is coming, and I don't want to lose you because of it. I assure you, the moment I know it's safe I'll come get you." Pure Vanilla Cookie promises them.

"I mean... I know, but this just seems like a bit much..." They try to dig their feet into the ground beneath them, not that it works or does anything.

"You don't have to worry about someone else taking you away from there, only my kind of magic can open it and, well, you already know that it's a secret passed among only my trusted advisors." He pulls them around in front of him, lovingly stroking their cheek. "No one I don't trust will be able to take you from me." He pulls them closer, kissing them carefully, catching them off guard, before he pushes them backwards into whatever the seal he had made was.

They stumble forwards, but not into him or a tree like they expected. Instead they nearly ran over a much smaller cookie.

"Woah!" They fall onto their back, "Ow..."

"Oh! I'm sorry! Are you ok? I didn't hurt you did I?" A childish voice says above them.

"What?" They rub their eyes, trying to orient themselves to what is going on.

"Uh, Custard Cookie, maybe give them some space..." A shy voice says from somewhere else.

"What?" They repeat, not recognizing their surroundings in the slightest.

"Uh, hi there!" Ah, the voice of the typical protagonist, "We're just passing through the forest, sorry if we're bothering you."

They sit up, "What?"

"Excuse me, are you ok?" A more polite but serious voice asks.

They look around, counting a total of five cookies, none of which are Pure Vanilla Cookie, "What?! Stop going through my pockets!" They slap away the cookie with red hair away.

"You're good..." She snickers.

"I don't have anything of value on me anyways! Why would I have something that could be of importance when I was getting... got... what even happened?"

"Well when's the last thing you remember?" A white frosting wizard cookie asks.

They think hard about how to explain this without saying too much.
"Well... he said something about a war that was coming..."

"Uh, who?" A cookie in a pink hoodie with a lollipop asks.

"Um..."

"It's ok if you don't remember." The plain cookie with little skull candy buttons smiles, "You can join us in our quest! We're... well I don't remember what we're doing, but we're doing it!"

The cookie wearing a pink hoodie mumbles something about a cake hound with a crown.

"Oh, that's great, but I don't know if I'll be much help..." They laugh awkwardly.

"Well, what skills have you got?" The pickpocket asks.

"Uh, I can run. Like... really fast." They admit awkwardly.

"That's great! Running is our specialty!" The plain cookie smiles.

"But like... I can only run. That's the one thing I can do." They clarify.

"Ah ha! I, Custard Cookie III, will help ensure you remain safe with us! As king, it's my job to watch over the citizens of my kingdom."

Suddenly it clicks.

"Uh, what kingdom is that? Should you really be saying that to just anyone?" They laugh, trying to hide their realization.

"Our new kingdom that we just made! And you seem trustworthy." Custard Cookie III says.

"Not like you could beat us in a fight." The pickpocket laughs.

"Yeah..." They frown.

"Hey, uh, what's your name?" The cookie in the pink hoodie asks, "I'm Strawberry Cookie."

"Goodness, where are our manners?" The wizard gasps, "I'm Wizard Cookie."

"I'm Custard Cookie III! Proud king of our new kingdom!"

"Yeah yeah, I'm Chili Pepper Cookie."

"And I'm Gingerbrave! It's nice to meet you."

"Uh, I'm (C/F) Cookie." They introduce themself. "I'm not entirely sure when this is but... could you perhaps help me get back to... I don't know... the Hollyberry Kingdom?"

The cookies around them gasp.

"You're from the Hollyberry Kingdom?" Wizard Cookie asks in awe.

"Not exactly... I just don't want to go back to—"

"Wow! Does that mean you've been to the Vanilla Kingdom?"

Custard Cookie III gasps.

"Uh...." They drag out, hoping they'll take the hint and not ask.

"Ignore him." Wizard Cookie sighs, "We don't know what he's talking about half the time."

"The Hollyberry Kingdom is pretty far away..." Strawberry Cookie says.

"That doesn't mean we can't help!" Gingerbrave smiles.

"It's ok really..." (C/F) Cookie waves their hands, trying to drop the subject, "I'd rather not cause an issue— Wait, what do you mean you don't know what the Vanilla Kingdom is?"

"What?" Wizard Cookie asks.

"Oh, uh, nothing." They shake their head, "It's nothing. He said he'd be back... but I guess he's gone."

"Oh, I'm sorry." Strawberry Cookie says, frowning under her hood.

"Really, it's ok." (C/F) Cookie waves away the concern, "Let's get going."

"Alright then!" Gingerbrave leads the way down the path, with the rest of the five following him in a certain formation, with (C/F) Cookie behind them.

After a few minutes of running they speak up, annoyed.
"You guys call this running? This is barely more than a pleasant pace..." They frown.

"Like to see you go faster." Chili Pepper Cookie scoffs at the complaint.

"Ok, I'll scout ahead and come back telling you what I find." They sprint forward, easily passing the rest of the cookies and farther along the path, finding waves of cake monsters and other various enemies. They charge back to the group, "Nothing but cakes. Shouldn't be too much of a hassle to pass them, I'd do it myself but

well, I'm not good in a fight."

"That's ok!" Custard Cookie III smiles, "We are!"

"Yeah, we'll show those cakes a thing or two!" Gingerbrave agrees.

So (C/F) Cookie rejoins the back of the party, barely exercised from their little run, and watches the team pummel clean through the cake forces.
"Wow..." They gasp at the skill, "You guys really are impressive..." While they had never personally seen the Five battle together, they had heard first hand accounts from all of them of their adventures together.

It was nice to finally feel like they were a part of a group like that.

"Well the information we got from your little expedition forward was really useful in helping us—well me at least—prepare for what we were doing." Wizard Cookie admits.

"Yeah, thanks for being willing to go that far ahead." Strawberry Cookie agrees. "We're still getting the hang of fighting and knowing what to prepare for makes me a bit less nervous."

"Aww, thanks. I'm willing to keep doing that if you want. If it's useful." They blush. When was the last time they felt so included?

"I promote thee to the Royal Scout!" Custard Cookie III declares.

"O-oh! Ok." They laugh a bit.

And so that's how it was. They would run ahead and inform them of the oncoming enemies before taking their place out of harm's way and cheer the group from behind. It was fun to see the interesting things they found during the adventure.

Until they ran into someone familiar.

"Wait... White Lily Cookie?"

2: A Short Forever

"Oh, hello there. Do I... know you?" White Lily Cookie says.

"Yes, you do." (C/F) Cookie says, "Um, we have a few mutual friends, that's how we met."

"Hmm... I can't remember much of anything. I don't know who I am." White Lily Cookie frowns.

"Uh, that's ok, you can think about it while I go get my... new friends."
Yeah, it felt right calling them that.
"Maybe, if you still don't remember, we can try to help you remember what happened. I haven't seen you in forever, I was so worried about you... Well, about as worried as Pure Vanilla Cookie would let me be. Anyways, I have to go! I'll be back soon." They run to go back to the group.

"'Pure Vanilla Cookie...'" White Lily Cookie repeats.
Something sounded familiar about that name...

"Guys!!" They pant as they run back, "Let's get running! There's no particularly strong opponents ahead, not like the Werehound at least."

"You seem particularly excited." Strawberry Cookie sighs.

(C/F) Cookie nods enthusiastically. "There's a cookie up ahead that I want you all to meet! She's a friend of mine."

"Oh?" Wizard Cookie asks, "Who?"

"You'll see!"

Hurrying to the glade of lilies, Strawberry Cookie comments on the beautiful flowers.
"These lilies smell so sweet."

"Yes." Wizard Cookie agrees, "Wait, is that the cookie you meant (C/F) Cookie?"

"White Lily Cookie!" They run up to her again. "Did you remember anything?"

"I... I don't think so..." She says, "I'm still not even sure who exactly I am..."

"Well why don't you come with us?" Gingerbrave smiles, "We can help you."

But White Lily Cookie had disappeared.

"Huh..." (C/F) Cookie frowns, "She's never done that before..."

"Who is she?" Wizard Cookie asks.

They pause, debating how to answer, "Why don't we just keep going, hmm?" They run ahead.

"Uh, ok." Chili Pepper Cookie watches them. "They're definitely hiding something..."

"And how were they out alone in the woods if they're so clueless as to what's going on around them?" Strawberry Cookie asks.

"I've been trying to figure that out myself..." Wizard Cookie sighs, "And what exactly made them appear, since they seemed to materialize out of nowhere when we wandered off the path."

"Perhaps it was my royal self who rescued them." Custard Cookie III says proudly.

"Maybe." Wizard Cookie clearly doesn't agree, but keeps his mouth shut.

"Come on, let's get going. Maybe we'll find answers along our way." Gingerbrave leads the way along the path.

(C/F) Cookie comes running back, "More of the same, but if it's alright with you guys I'm gonna go look for White Lily Cookie."

"Ok! Let us know if you find her." Gingerbrave smiles.

"Will do!" They sprint back down the road and pretty far ahead, avoiding cake monsters and anyone they don't recognize.
He had told them that cookies he didn't trust would hurt them, and he didn't want them to get hurt. They didn't want to get hurt either. But if Custard Cookie III has his secretly passed magic, then the adventurers must be trustworthy!

They found White Lily Cookie far ahead on the path, admiring the bones of a fallen dragon.

"White Lily Cookie!" They run up to her.

"Oh, it's you again. Thank you for reminding me of my name." She smiles. "I was about to look for those nice cookies you were kind enough to introduce me to."

"Yeah, they seem nice. Have you remembered anything else yet?" (C/F) Cookie asks.

"Not yet." White Lily Cookie frowns, "But I hope with your help I will. Something about you feels so familiar, yet so different."

"Well, I'm the same as I always have been." They laugh, "What are you looking at this dragon for?"

"I'm admiring how it has become one with the forest. It's so much fun to learn."

"Yeah, you haven't changed at all." (C/F) Cookie laughs, "You always had something new and interesting to tell me. It was always refreshing to spend time with you."

White Lily Cookie smiles as they look over at her, hiding however she had felt a few seconds before.
"I... hope you don't mind, but I want to spend a bit more time alone." She glances away from them.

"No, that's ok. I actually think I'll just wait here for them." They look up at the massive bones of the dragon. "See you later, White Lily Cookie!"

"Goodbye (C/F) Cookie." White Lily Cookie disappears.

They sit down on a nearby rock, thinking.
"Did I tell her my name?"

3: Pointlessly Endless

(C/F) Cookie actually screams when they see Custard Cookie III running at them full speed, having mistaken him for... someone else.
They were worried he'd be angry that someone opened their seal...

"Woah!" Custard Cookie III stops, "I'm not that scary, am I?"

"Uh, no. Sorry. I'm just nervous." They admit.

"Are you ok (C/F) Cookie?" Gingerbrave comes running up next, everyone else just behind.

"Yeah, Custard Cookie just startled me." They smile, "I guess I'm a bit worried that... nevermind."

"We saw White Lily Cookie." Strawberry Cookie informs them.

"Oh, yeah, I did too. I just figured I'd stay here and wait for you all to catch up." They smile.

"Hello again." White Lily Cookie says, "Isn't it beautiful how the dragon's carcass has become one with the soil and grass?"

"Have you found your memories?" Gingerbrave asks her.

(C/F) Cookie zones out, thinking about everything they had, forcibly, left behind.
White Lily Cookie had left to go try and learn something, but before she came back... well, she hadn't. She had been very solemn and determined when she had departed, promising to tell (C/F) Cookie if she discovered anything and clearly something horrible had happened to her.

"Uh, (C/F) Cookie?" Chili Pepper Cookie's voice snaps them back to what's going on.

"What?" They have to stop themself from screaming again.

"We're moving." She says, "I know you can easily keep up, but don't get left behind."

"Oh, right. Sorry, I just have a lot on my mind." They sigh.

"You can share it with us if you want, it might help us understand." Wizard Cookie speaks up.

"Yeah, friends are always there for each other." Gingerbrave smiles.

"Uh, I'm not sure..." They frown.

"As king, I want my subjects to feel safe in my presence." Custard Cookie III says.

"That's not it either."

"(C/F) Cookie," Strawberry Cookie speaks up, "Is there anything you would mind sharing with us?"

"Umm..." They think about that question for a good second, "Well, that depends on what you want to know... I often had to ask other cookies to get straight answers for anything... The only two skills I seem to have are running and being able to tell when I'm being lied to."

"That's depressing." Chili Pepper Cookie frowns.

"Stop right there! You shall go no furrrther!" A small flying black and white creature says.

"And who might you be?" Gingerbrave asks.

"Bat-Cat! My meowster orrrdered me to stop your advance!" The creature known as Bat-Cat meows.

"You're with the Cake Monsters!" Gingerbrave frowns, "You kidnapped the Bear Jellies and stole their royal jelly!"

"I don't think I was here for that." (C/F) Cookie mumbles to Strawberry Cookie, who happens to be next to them.

"No, we ran into you right after we left their village." She explains.

"Oh."

Custard Cookie III shrieks loudly as the enemy jellies begin their attack, per Bat-Cat's orders.

(C/F) Cookie hurries to the back of the group, feeling bad that they can't help the poor kid. They watch as the five cookies pummel through the adversaries.
"This will never cease to amaze me. You guys are such a great team."

"We're still not very good at coordination." Wizard Cookie shrugs, "Perhaps we'll get better as we keep going."

"Come on guys."
Gingerbrave and Strawberry cookie lead the way from the front, continuing down the path that was the dragon's spine.

The advance continued with the pattern of fighting enemies and running, (C/F) Cookie excitedly taking the lead when they came to a brief coin running path (afterwards they returned to the back to not get attacked first by a worm). Then the group came to a grassy patch.

"Meow he he!" Bat-Cat laughs, "We're not done herrre yet!"

"What's so funny?!" Chili Pepper Cookie demands.

"Soon enough, you will see!" Bat-Cat miraculously gets through an entire sentence without a cat pun, "Our crrreation, made with the finest Bear Jellies!"

"LEGENDARY DRAGON!" A tiny Jelly Worm speaks.

"What?" (C/F) Cookie says, actually not able to hear the tiny thing from the back.
"Huh?" Gingerbrave says simultaneously from the front.

"Gya ha ha!" The worm laughs, "My wish came true! I AM A DRAGON!"

"What?!" (C/F) Cookie yells from the back, "Could you speak up?"

"You called me a tiny Jelly Worm! Now witness the dragon's wrath!"

"I still can't hear them." The cookie finally gives up.

"Sometimes it's hard to be in the back." Custard Cookie III laments, "But it's safer back here- OH HE'S BIG NOW!"

"MHA HA HA!" The Jelly Wyrm laughs, "Leave no crumbs!"

"Hey! Now I can hear them!" They smile, "Wait... did the tiny Jelly Worm just turn into a dragon? How did they even do that?" They look around "Aaand everyone else is fighting the dragon."

"What on Earthbread?" A suspicious looking cookie says behind them, "Who is this cookie?"

"Uh..." (C/F) Cookie looks at the robed figure, "I'm not here!" They sprint past the dragon and out into the sands of the desert, tripping over a rock they hadn't seen and face planting due to their carelessness.
They stayed like this. Not because the fall hurt, but because it was actually kind of nice to lie face down in the sand.

"Uh, (C/F) Cookie? Are you ok?" Wizard Cookie's voice says above them.

"Do you need me to heal you at all?" Custard Cookie III adds.

They raise their head out of the sand, "I feel great! I don't know if I've ever felt so alive!"

"Why are you lying with your face in the sand?" Chili Pepper Cookie asks, clearly extremely confused.

"It's a nice contrast to a soft bed and stone floors, as well as the moist dirt in the forest." They smile. "I mean sand! It's the worst when it's anywhere but a beach or desert. It makes a mess! But when you're sick of being stuck inside it's great to appreciate the outdoors."

"Right..." Chili Pepper Cookie says.

"You tripped, didn't you?" Wizard Cookie sighs.

"Maybe." They answer quickly, standing up and dusting themself off. "Where are we going anyways?"

"Apparently there's a thriving kingdom nearby." Wizard Cookie informs them.

"So we're going there to meet all the cookies!" Gingerbrave finishes.

"Oh, I know where you're talking about." They have to physically stop themself from shaking, "I don't know the desert well, so you guys lead the way." They take their place at the back of the party.

"Are you sure you're ok (C/F) Cookie?" Custard Cookie III asks them, "You seem scared."

"Heh... Why would I be scared? There's nothing to be scared of!" They laugh nervously.

"If you say so." He drops the subject as they start running, thankfully.

The desert was full of weird goblins called "ginkgoblins".
(C/F) Cookie was too nervous to leave the group in fear of getting robbed, or worse.

After a bit of navigation, pummeling through enemies, and running the group made their way into Pilgrim's Village.

While everyone else looked for information on the kingdom, (C/F) Cookie sat down on a bench by the central fountain.
They didn't really want to go back to the Vanilla Kingdom just yet... his majesty would definitely be angry with them. Maybe there was a way to delay the trip or reroute and go to the Hollyberry Kingdom nearby before heading home.

Was the Vanilla Kingdom even really their home anymore?

They sigh, burying their face in their hands and leaning forward

onto their legs, still seated on the bench.

"Excuse me there... uh, sir? Ma'am?" A trader nearby calls out to them, "I believe your friends are departing."

Looking up (C/F) Cookie sees the five of them standing by the exit to the village, probably waiting for them to come back over.

"(C/F) Cookie!" Chili Pepper Cookie yells impatiently.

"Come on! The Kingdom is waiting for me!" Custard Cookie III adds.

They stand up, sighing once again as they make their way around the bench and over to the group. "Hey, uh, if it's ok, I think I'll just stay here for a bit..."

"Ok, we're going to go through the trials to get to the Vanilla Kingdom!" Gingerbrave smiles.

"Trials?" (C/F) Cookie says, confused.

"Yeah, the villagers said we need to pass the trials to go there." The brave cookie explains.

"O...k." They nod slowly, not fully understanding. "I'll... I'll catch up with you guys later."

"Or we'll just come back for you." Wizard Cookie shrugs, "Whichever comes first."

"See ya." (C/F) Cookie makes their way to the bar the five had probably just gone to.

The place was rather packed, but they managed to find a place to sit near a wall.

"Never seen you around here before, dear." An elderly pilgrim woman says. "What brings you here?"

They jump, startled by the sudden interaction, and the use of the nickname, "Oh, I'm technically with the five who just passed through."

"Oh? Are you also looking for the Vanilla Kingdom?" She asks them.

"No... I don't really want to go back there just yet. Besides, with this whole 'trial' business it's obvious that something horrible happened to it." They sigh.

The bar goes eerily quiet.

"You said you didn't want to go... back to the Vanilla Kingdom?" An elderly Pilgrim man, who must be the village elder, joins their conversation, "A cookie as young as you couldn't possibly have been there before! Even I am too young to have been there before it disappeared!"

"Well... I got... sealed away so I'd be out of harm's reach during whatever the catastrophe was... I didn't even know it was gone until the five of them didn't know what the kingdom was." They don't want to end up giving all the details of this story, but they can already tell they're going to have to.

"Well then you must be someone of great importance!" The woman gasps.

"Not really... maybe to some, but very few would actually know who I was, well am." They frown, not wanting to continue. "I was just of great importance to someone important, who ensured I was not in danger. But what happened to the Vanilla Kingdom?"

"Well, at the conclusion of the Dark Flour War, King Pure Vanilla Cookie sealed it away, and no one has seen it since." Another villager jumps in.

"Oh." They say holding back tears, "I guess that something horrible happened to the rest of the Five Heroes because of that?"

"They all disappeared." The Village Elder nods sadly.

(C/F) Cookie feels tears slide down their face, "Oh..."
Of course the truth had to be the most painful answer of them all!
He sealed them away to keep them safe, and ended up getting crumbled himself!
He didn't come back for them because he couldn't!

What would've happened to them of Custard Cookie III hadn't gotten close enough to open it?

"Are you ok?"

The pilgrims all seemed confused by their reaction.

"I don't know anymore..." They shake their head, "Everything has changed so much. I don't even know what I'm supposed to do."

"While you're here, you could stock up on supplies and—" the elderly woman says.

"I don't have anything on me." (C/F) Cookie cuts them off, "I have nothing left."

There is almost total silence. Almost because they have to stop themself from ugly crying and aren't really able to.

They shove their face back to the comfort of their hands, finally just giving up. They can feel the pilgrims all slowly circle them to comfort them. Soft words and pats on the back felt empty without someone familiar to cry on.

But there really was no one left.

"What's your name dear?" The Village Elder asks them, now right beside them.

"(C/F) Cookie..." They answer, having mastered the art of speaking calmly while sobbing hysterically.

"(C/F) Cookie," He starts, "You're always welcome to come back here. Don't worry about the payment. You can tell us various things about the past as a payment instead."

They nod, not really sure how else to respond.

"Now, why don't we go catch up to those friends of yours?" He takes their arm and leads them outside and out of the village another way, following a secret path.

"Why did you lie to them about the Vanilla Kingdom?" (C/F) Cookie asks.

"We guard the secret of the kingdom because if the kingdom were to return, so too would Dark Enchantress Cookie." The Village Elder explains.

"Who?" They ask.

"She started the war. She and her soldiers would burn cookies to ash, the "dark flour"."

"Oh." They frown and wipe their eyes, "Wait what are you doing?" They watch him hand a massive sack of coins to a ginkgoblin.

"Well, for the trials, we had them destroy the path, see?" He gestures to a massive pile of boulders. "Do you want any of my favorite juice?" He offers them a cup of black juice.

"This is a very sudden change in topic." They point out, chuckling slightly, now feeling a lot better.

"Well your friends are just over there, and we wouldn't want to crush their adventurous spirits now, would we?"

"I guess?"

"Hey (C/F) Cookie." Strawberry Cookie greets shyly.

"Hey guys." They greet back, awkwardly holding the cup of juice.

"Ho Ho Ho! Our young friends! Glad to see you!" The Village Elder cuts in.

"The Elder! (C/F) Cookie! What brings you here?" Gingerbrave asks.

"Oh, we're just having a stroll with some of my favorite juice. That's what old cookies do. Would you like some?" The Village Elder baffles (C/F) Cookie with how easily he can pretend they weren't just discussing what they were.

"Uh, you guys can have mine. I've always found juice to be

exceptionally bitter." They admit, offering their cup to Wizard Cookie.

"Um, thanks, but..." Wizard Cookie takes the cup from them and then points to the pilgrim, "Your beard is melting."

"Oh dear! Really?" The Village Elder looks down at his beard, "I should cut to the point then. The Ginkgoblins were unusually destructive recently." He gestures to the massive pile of boulders. "You see, the road to Hero's Gate has been destroyed."

"Yeah..." (C/F) Cookie glances off in the direction the bribed Ginkgoblins went in.

"No way..." Strawberry Cookie frowns.

"Make sure not to fall in the chasm. Stay safe out there!" He finishes.

"So (C/F) Cookie." Custard Cookie III smiles, "Are you joining up with us again?"

"Well uh-"

"(C/F) Cookie will join you after you've passed the gate. Wouldn't want them getting hurt!" The Elder answers for them.

"I guess not." They shrug.

"You know, they can answer for themself." Chili Pepper Cookie frowns.

"It's fine." (C/F) Cookie waves it off, "I wouldn't want to get in your way anyway."

"Are you sure?" Wizard Cookie asks.

When was the last time someone had genuinely wanted their opinion?

"Um, yeah." They glance at the Elder, who clearly didn't want them to reveal the secret. "I'll see you guys later."

"Bye (C/F) Cookie." Strawberry Cookie waves as the five continue.

"Bye." They return the wave.

"Now..." The Elder says when the five are gone, "Let's go back to the village. I want to hear some of the stories you have of the Vanilla Kingdom!"

"Oh!" They gasp. "I don't have very many good ones..."

"Oh, but you definitely have a few with a special someone who was willing to do some seriously powerful magic to keep you safe." He teases.

They awkwardly blush. "I don't really. After a while I never really saw him during the day..."

"Oh, so it's a 'him'!"

They sputter.

"Was it one of Pure Vanilla Cookie's retainers? Did you know the great King himself?"

"I'm going to be honest." They snicker, "Pure Vanilla Cookie is a massive nerd. Probably his most prized possession was a massive library that had a book on everything." They pause, "Either that or the massive amount of cotton candy sheep, the wool of which every cushion and blanket in the Castle is made of. There was one time when the cookie watching the stables didn't close the door properly and—"

"Wait wait! Tell these when we get back to the Village. I want to get out of the heat, and get another fill on my hot, black juice."

(C/F) Cookie laughs loudly.

4: Legends until the End of Time

"And then—"

"The travelers have reached the gate." The Elder says suddenly, cutting (C/F) Cookie off mid-story.

"What?"

"Those five friends of yours have reached the entrance of Hero's Gate."

"Woah, how do you know that?"

"The guardian told me."

"Oh, cool?" They don't understand, but get up to follow him anyway.

There were secret tunnels that allowed for easier travel to the gate, while being able to see those on the path easily.

"Hey guys." (C/F) Cookie greets Gingerbrave and the rest.

"(C/F) Cookie!" Gingerbrave smiles, "We were starting to wonder if you were just farther ahead."

"No, I just had to run here real quick."
This was mostly true, the secret passageways had no danger, so they had easily run ahead to get there faster. "What have you guys found so far?"

"Well." Wizard Cookie starts.

"A whole lot of treasure!" Chili Pepper Cookie cuts in.
She and (C/F) Cookie laugh loudly.

"Ahem." Wizard Cookie coughs, "We haven't found anything new. We found a group of giant cookie statues just before we ran into you before."

"Was there five of them?" (C/F) Cookie asks.

"How did you know?" Strawberry Cookie gasps.

"Obviously they must be the five ancient heroes. I mean, no one else would be carved into a statue on the path to the Vanilla Kingdom." They laugh.

"What about you?" Custard Cookie III asks, "Would you also possibly have your face carved into rock?"

"Uh, no?" They frown, "Why would I be one?"

"Well, you just seem important!" The childish cookie smiles widely.

"Really?" They tightly clasp their hands together. "I've never been told that before..."

"Are you ok?" Strawberry cookie asks, noticing they were visibly shaking.

"Yep!"

"You sure?" Gingerbrave asks.

"Uh huh!"

"Alright, then let's go!" He leads the way through the Hero's Gate.

"This place feels different." Strawberry Cookie comments, "Is this what the Vanilla Kingdom was like?"

"Let's hurry and let them know about their king's return!" Custard Cookie III cheers.

"Mhe he, that kingdom better be rich. I'm filling my bags tonight!" Chili Pepper Cookie laughs.

"I hope that'll be enough to get me that new DLC..." Strawberry

Cookie smiles.

"I hate to be the pessimist, but I doubt we'll reach there by tonight. It's still quite a ways from here..." They frown. Lying to these kids felt so wrong.

"All the more reason to hurry!" Gingerbrave grins. "I wonder what awaits us at the opposite end!"

They all start the run through the Hero's Gate.
(C/F) Cookie mostly examined the many pillars all around as the rest fought the enemies. It wasn't enough to keep their mind off the idea that everything they were doing is pointless.

"Hey, (C/F) Cookie!" Wizard Cookie yells to get their attention, "Come see this tapestry?"

"Hmm?" They wander over and stare up at the image of a familiar cookie and a sheep overlooking a mountain range.

"Such remarkable craftsmanship, don't you think?" He says.

"The sand reminds me of Pilgrim's Village." Strawberry Cookie grins.

"Sand? Those are clouds... Oh! Yeah, it's pretty cool." They chuckle.

"Are you alright, (C/F) Cookie?" Gingerbrave asks them, "You seem like you have something on your mind."

"Well, aside from the fact that I was in a completely different time period this morning, with... that's not the point; I think I'm handling this situation rather well." They shake their head, smiling a little. "Chili Pepper Cookie, I thought I told you I have nothing of value on me."

"Dang it! I thought maybe you'd have picked up something worth stealing when you were in that village."

"No." They shake their head, "Though it definitely would've been a good idea. Say, when was the last time you guys saw White Lily Cookie? I didn't see her the entirety of our time in the desert."

"Huh, you're right." Gingerbrave thinks, "Oh well, maybe we'll see her again later."

"She seems nice." Custard Cookie III smiles brightly.

"We should probably keep moving if we ever want to pass this trial." Wizard Cookie says awkwardly.

"Oh, sorry." (C/F) Cookie chuckles bashfully, "Can I go on ahead?"

"Can we stop you from doing that?" Chili Pepper Cookie snickers. "You can outspeed me! None of us could catch you if you just ran."

"Go on ahead Royal Scout!" Custard Cookie III commands.

"Ok." They grin before sprinting off up ahead.
Now alone and regretting their decision to leave the others, they slow down and sit down next to a wall to think about their life choices.

Hearing a voice that did not belong to the five they were traveling with, they quickly look around, spying a cookie and a few monsters hiding out of clear sight. They recognize the group from the Jelly Wyrm fight and frown at the trio.

They stand up and sneak over to the three of them, "What are you doing?"

All three yell in unison.

"Heh." They snicker at the reaction, "I must be really scary..."

"It's you!" The cookie shouts.

"Me." (C/F) Cookie says proudly, "I am indeed myself."

"Who are you?" The cookie demands.

"I'm the one asking the questions here." They shake their head, "I wouldn't be surprised if the Village Elder kicks you out of here and bans you for cheating the trials like this..."

"Ha! Like you're in a better situation! You haven't fought a sugar cube since you passed the gate. We actually can battle."

"The difference is I'm traveling with a group that is fairly doing the trial." They cross their arms.

"The diffurrence is that we'rrre betterrr than you!" Bat-Cat purrs.

"Tell me, have you ever been to the Vanilla Kingdom?" They laugh.

"Uh, obviously if our goal is to get there we haven't been there." The Cookie scoffs.

"Master has a point." The Cake Werehound declares.

"Well, that makes me better than all of you." They smile. They look up the path as they hear Chili Pepper Cookie and Custard Cookie's voices echo around the passageway.
"Later losers!" They run on ahead, hearing the three trying to catch up, sputtering and yelling after them.

"What?" They ask the group, coming to a stop where they all were looking at a wall.

"Look!" Gingerbrave says in awe, pointing to another tapestry.

"It's the five ancient heroes fighting a dragon." They shrug, "It highlights the hero of Truth, probably because these tapestries are about him."

"How do you know that?" Wizard Cookie gasps.

"I remember this day." They shrug, "I got locked in the basement to stay out of harm's way. Took me three hours to pick the lock, only to find out it was magically sealed."

"Yeesh." Chili Pepper Cookie grimaces, "How did you get out?"

"Well, I almost kicked down the door. Then someone else came and opened it from the other side. I just waited with them until um... well..." They remember the words that were yelled in their face when he came back.

"(C/F) Cookie?" Strawberry Cookie snaps them back to reality.

"What?" They say quickly.

"Maybe we should just keep going..." She tugs her hoodie strings nervously.

"Yeah, I get the feeling I don't want to know if you have other stories like that..." Wizard Cookie shudders.

They survey the group, unaware of what such a minor incident made everyone else think.

"That probably sounds much worse than it actually was because the ending was just me getting screamed at for not staying put." They finish.

"Oh." Custard Cookie III breathes a sigh of relief, his face gaining a bit of color back.

"Not much better than what I thought." Strawberry Cookie mumbles.

"Let's just keep going." Gingerbrave leads the way as the others continue down the path.

"Now I feel guilty for ruining such an epic moment." They frown at the tapestry.

"Hi (C/F) Cookie!"

"CRUMBS!!!" They exclaim, "White Lily Cookie you scared me."

"Whoops, sorry." She snickers.

"No. No you're not." They shake their head.

"Maybe it was a bit intentional." She smiles widely.

"What have you been up to?"

"Oh, just traveling around, trying to find my memories."

"Right." They nod. "Do you remember this day?"

"Oh! I am in this tapestry!" White Lily Cookie grins, "Isn't this the day you nearly broke your legs trying to escape the safe room?"

"We don't talk about that first part." (C/F) Cookie flushes in embarrassment.

"Funny that I remember that for your crumbling limbs and not the dragon." White Lily says thoughtfully.

"Huh."

"We should probably catch up with the others." White Lily laughs. "If you want to walk with me, that is."

"Are you challenging me to a race?"

"...Maybe."

"Race to where?"

"The next tapestry?" She shrugs.

"Go." They sprint off.

"Hey! I wasn't ready!" She yells after them.

"You're magic, you'll just beat me anyway." They yell back to her.

The slide to a stop in front of the image on the wall, passing the ginkgoblins' fancy ride.

"How did you beat us here?" Wizard Cookie gapes.

"I ran past when you all were fighting." They brag.

"But we didn't see you!" Chili Pepper Cookie exclaims.

"That's because I'm fast and you all were fighting." They smile smugly.

"Woah! Cool tapestry!" Custard Cookie III gasps.

"And this is..." Strawberry Cookie starts.

Wizard Cookie opens his mouth to explain.

"The coronation of the Vanilla Kingdom's king." (C/F) Cookie beats him to it.

"No, it's the kingdom's founding!" Wizard Cookie snaps.

"I mean, same thing really..." They shrug.

"That must be the original founder and king!" Gingerbrave exclaims. "I wonder who that was, and where this Cookie is now! I'd love to meet them..."

"...I'm just going to go on ahead." (C/F) Cookie shakes their head, running down the path.

It wasn't too long before they came face to face with yet another reminder of what happened.

"White Lily Cookie! You said the next tapestry! Not this!" They gesture wildly to the statue of Pure Vanilla Cookie.

White Lily Cookie jumps, "Oh, it's just you." She seemed remorseful.

"Sorry if you were having a moment with our statue friend." They frown at her expression.

"No, but... do you care about what's happened to him?" She asks them.

"That is such a complicated question that I can't answer it without feeling wrong in some way." They stare up at the face of the statue.

"Why?" She turns to see their face.

"Because yeah, I miss him, but... a part of me wonders if I really should. Everyone else has found some of the things I used to think were normal as odd or unnerving." They sigh, "I don't know how I'm supposed to feel..."

"(C/F) Cookie..." White Lily Cookie frown.

"It's just a lot... one day I think everything is fine, then the next I'm being shoved into a spell that preserved me until this morning!" They sob, "And not only that, but you're here. You didn't come back before, and now you don't even know who I am! How do I know he didn't do this to you?" They siffle before they continue, "I'm just so stressed out! I don't know what's going on! I feel like I'm questioning everything I thought I knew. And I'm sorry for making you listen to this, it's just all tumbling out!"

"(C/F) Cookie..." White Lily Cookie stands up and gracefully hurries over to their side, pulling them into a hug. "You don't need to be sorry! You have every right to be upset and confused!"

"I... I do?"

"Of course you do! Why wouldn't you?" She pulls away and smiles at them. "It's actually rather refreshing to see you this emotional. You always seemed so nervous around him..." She froze, "I don't think I remember seeing the two of you together, that just felt like it was correct. Huh." She let go, leaving both to ponder whatever that conversation was.

"I hope you'll remember..." They nod.

"I hope so too. I hope you figure yourself out."

"What an impressive statue!" Wizard Cookie ruins the moment.

"Gah!" (C/F) Cookie yells, "Sorry, we didn't hear you... Wait, how long have you been standing there?"

"We just barely got here." Gingerbrave informs them, "Why?"

"We were just having a private conversation..." They shrug.

"Who is this?" Custard Cookie III points to the statue.

"This is an old friend of mine and the founder of the Vanilla Kingdom." White Lily Cookie looks up at the face of the statue, "Pure Vanilla Cookie."

(C/F) Cookie shudders as a chill runs up their back upon hearing his name, but everyone else was too focused on the figure to notice. They look around, feeling like they were being watched by some invisible force that wasn't really there, unless they were now hyperconscious of the odd trio following them or the Village Elder hiding among the secret trail through the trial.

"(C/F) Cookie." Chili Pepper Cookie says, breaking their train of thought, "Hey! (C/F) Cookie! Are you good? You didn't comment about my attempt at pickpocketing your empty pockets just now."

"How many times will it take you to realize that I don't have anything?" They ask her.

"Never not worth checking." She laughs, "But we're going. I just wanted to make sure you didn't get left behind, and by I, I mean Strawberry Cookie who told me to check your pockets to see if that would snap you out of whatever you were doing."

"Oh..." They frown, "Sorry. I just have a lot on my mind."

"Nah, I'm not too worried about it, with the two of us being the fastest in the group, we can undoubtedly catch up pretty fast." She grins, "I'll race ya!"

"Go!" (C/F) Cookie yells and they shoot off, Chili Pepper Cookie close behind.

"Hey! Good to see you guys caught up!" Gingerbrave says as the racers stop a little ways away from the group—as not to run over any cookie.

"How... how are you so fast?" Chili Pepper Cookie pants.

"You seem like more of a sprinter." (C/F) Cookie evaluates, "I can maintain a faster pace for longer amounts of time because I have little strength in any other regard. I often joked that I was born into the wrong universe or something."

"Huh." Wizard Cookie says, "So how long have you been able to run before you get too tired?"

"Don't think I've ever tested that. After some jerk shoved me in the river when me and my... my friend were traveling around the Hollyberry Kingdom, neither of us were really open for running around public spaces."

"Talk about disrespect." Custard Cookie III crosses his arms angrily.

"Hey, so anyways, do you guys know how close we are to the end here?" They change the subject.

"I think the exit is right up here." Gingerbrave points up the path.

"I can hear growling." Strawberry Cookie nods.

"One second." (C/F) Cookie hurries up to peak around the corner and looks up at the massive Sugar Guardian Golem.
They quickly hurry back, "Yep, that is a boss battle if I've ever seen one."

"What is it?" Wizard Cookie asks.

"Well, I assume it's similar to the previous gate guardian, but more like the enemies in here."

"This is why you're the scout." Custard Cookie III smiles, "I'm too scared to leave the group at all."

"Well you all are incredibly strong together, and I am just fast. I can outrun danger in a crisis while together you all can defeat it." They reason.

"Ha! You flatter us too much." Chili Pepper Cookie—who had caught her breath while everyone was talking—laughs.

"Well let's go guys! It's time to finish the trials and go to the Vanilla Kingdom." Gingerbrave smiles.

Everyone cheers—though not everyone is enthusiastic—and the six hurry to the end of the trial, where they come face to face with the guardian.

The White Sugar Golem Guardian roars as the challengers

approach.

"I believe in you guys!" (C/F) Cookie stops to watch the fight.

"I see that you're feeling better." White Lily Cookie smiles.

"Oh, hey! When did you get here?" They ask her, not having noticed her before.

"Just now, I don't think you were paying attention to the conversation the rest of us had at the statue; Gingerbrave invited me to come with you all to the Vanilla Kingdom."

"That's great!" They reply, "But... there isn't a way to get there... The pilgrims told me that the whole kingdom has disappeared."

"Oh no!" She gasps, "Why?"

"I'm not too sure." They frown, "I mean, a part of me is relieved. It's nice to be able to run again. But all the Cookies I knew are undoubtedly gone, aside from maybe him and you."

"I wish I could be of more help in telling you what happened." White Lily Cookie sighs, "I just remember Pure Vanilla Cookie trying to protect me."

"I'm not blaming you. It's not your fault."

"I know, I just feel bad with all the stress you must be in."

"No, don't be sorry, I actually think it will do me some good in the long run. I haven't had much time to think about my life prior to this, and now I do. I have friends who I know care about me and will help me make decisions that will help me." (C/F) Cookie shares a smile with her.

"You're right." White Lily Cookie nods, "We can't think this is completely hopeless. We have friends to stand beside us."

"That reminds me." They gasp, "Right before you left—and I got preserved—you said you'd tell me what you found on your quest. When you remember what that is, will you tell me?"

"Of course I will. You'll undoubtedly be the first—after myself—to know." She smiles.

"Thanks."

5: Unending Dread

[AHHHH! It got deleted!]

"So..." (C/F) Cookie breaks the silence of the trek through the forest —the group had been pointed that way following the defeat of the Sugar Guardian and the reveal of the disappearance of the Vanilla Kingdom—"Anything anyone want to talk about?"

"Why don't you go first?" Strawberry Cookie suggests, "You've been with us for a while, and we still know so little about you."

"To be fair, every time I've shared a story with you I've freaked you all out." They chuckle nervously.

"They aren't that bad." Custard Cookie III shrugs, "Do you have any silly stories?"

"Yeah, (C/F) Cookie! Why don't you tell us about the Vanilla Kingdom?" White Lily Cookie laughs.

Their eyes widen as everyone gasps.

"What?!" All five adventurers yell in unison.

"Uhhh... I uh, *cough* I don't know what she's talking about..." They go pale.

"Yes you do!" White Lily Cookie giggles, "Stop lying to them!"

"Why- why would I be lying?" They internally scream at her to shut up.

"Hmm, are you just embarrassed by it? After all you are—"

"I'M GOING TO STOP YOU THERE!" They shout, their pale face flushing brightly with embarrassment of what she almost just said. "It's not even that big a deal..."

"You're from the Vanilla Kingdom?" Wizard Cookie exclaims.

"No, I uh, technically am, I guess, but really I'm older than it." (C/F) Cookie shrugs.

"No way! So you must have known Pure Vanilla Cookie!" Custard Cookie III declares.

White Lily Cookie snickers.

"In a sense, yeah. I mean, he was a very busy king and always had so much to do. Really it was—" They don't realize that they're progressively speaking faster and faster.

"(C/F) Cookie!" White Lily Cookie cuts them off.

"Huh?"

Silence.

"Can you not talk so fast?" Strawberry Cookie asks.

"Oh, sorry." They bashfully rubs their arm, "I just don't want to talk about that."

"That's ok. You don't have to." GingerBrave assures them.

"Uh, does anyone else have stories they want to share?" Strawberry Cookie asks, "I mean, I could talk about my games, but I don't know if any of you would want to listen to that..."

"You don't have to say anything either. I, for one, would love to hear about them, but it's ok to just have silence as we walk." (C/F) Cookie smiles weakly.

"But silence is boring!" Chili Pepper Cookie whines.

"Then how do you suggest we fill it?" Custard Cookie III asks her.

"Hmm, how about I swipe your scepter and we'll listen to you yelling at me to give it back?"

"Please don't do that." Wizard Cookie groans.

White Lily Cookie chuckles beside (C/F) Cookie as the two follow behind the five fighters.

"It's so nice to see such great friends; they remind me of when we all joked around like this."

"Yeah." They nod sadly.

"Why don't you want to tell them?" She asks.

"How much do you remember?"

"I remember him never shutting up about you." She snickers, "He loved you so much."

They flush with embarrassment, "He got so busy and it felt like he never wanted to spend time with me. He always tried to hide why he couldn't stay. I feel that is suspicious."

"Did you feel that way before, or is that a realization you've made today?" She asks.

"I don't know how I felt before. A part of me feels like I wasn't allowed to experience things for myself." They frown, then smile a little. "It makes me feel like a kid again."

"You seem happier." White Lily Cookie agrees, "From what I remember at least."

"Do you remember when we—that is me, you, and him—would all get ice cream when you guys ditched class?" They ask, smiling at the memory.

"I... I don't think so."

"Oh."

They dropped their conversation and continued to follow the fighters pummelling through the mushrooms and other attackers in the forest.

After a bit of distance, the wind suddenly picks up speed, every

Cookie wearing a hat is forced to grab hold of theirs.

"Ack! What is that?" Wizard Cookie yells.

"The wind is so strong, I can't open my eyes...!" White Lily Cookie winces at the sudden change.

"Everyone, be careful." GingerBrave warns.

"Let's all try to stay together." (C/F) Cookie agrees.

They kept moving, fighting the enemies and awful winds.
Entering a mossy group of trees, Chili Pepper Cookie groans at the coming waves of enemies.

"What now?"

"The forest spirits are attacking us...!" Strawberry Cookie frowns.

"At least the wind has died down a little." (C/F) Cookie pants. It seems as though running a lot in one day—after years of not doing that—has finally caused them fatigue, and fighting against the wind definitely hasn't helped.

Why didn't this catch up to them earlier? A high sun is going to help give energy to Cookies, now that the sun is obscured or setting, their somewhat healthy sleep schedule (courtesy of Pure Vanilla Cookie) is telling them it's time to sleep.

They didn't realize how little their tired mind could understand clearly until Custard Cookie III had to grab them to keep them from falling over or running over him again.

"What?" They murmur.

"Uh, guys." He frowns, "I think we need to let (C/F) Cookie rest. I can't hold them up like this much longer..."

Everyone else had been busy talking to the Pomegranate Village Priestesses and hadn't realized what the poor child was doing.

"That Cookie is in no condition to travel with you where you're

going." The High Priestess frowns, "I certainly hope you won't need their help."

"Oh no," Wizard Cookie shakes his head, "they can't fight, they're just traveling with us."

"Someone help!" Custard Cookie III cries, using his back to keep the sleeping cookie he was supporting from getting a face-full of tainted dirt.

"Do not worry for your friend." The other priestess gives the child a hand, lifting (C/F) Cookie in her arms with ease, "We will ensure their safety while you help us."

"Thanks, and don't worry, we'll take care of that alter." GingerBrave grins. "Let's go guys!"

(C/F) Cookie sat up, not quite sure where they were. "Uh, guys?"

"Oh, you're awake sooner than we anticipated."

"Who???" They quickly get off the bed— wait, when did they get to a place that would have a bed?
They immediately regret their decision because they discover that it hurts to move, especially their legs.

"Oh, I am one of the priestesses of Pomegranate Village. Your friends entrusted you to our care while they are freeing the forest of the curse." The cookie introduces herself to them, "But who might you be?"

"Uh, (C/F) Cookie."

"(C/F) Cookie..." the priestess repeats, "A strange magic resides with you."

"What?"

"I believe it is a standard tracking spell among other wizards, we here use the sacred tree for our magic." She explains.

They sigh, "Wouldn't surprise me actually."

"I see. You must know someone who is constantly concerned for your whereabouts." She frowns, "Come, let us go meet your friends."

"Uh, ok."
Seems as though it's all business around here.

They follow her to a massive tree.

"Your friends have ascended the tree to free the sugar swan of the curse."

"What?"

"They're in the canopy."

"I guess I'll just follow this convenient path up the tree then!" They shrug.

"Goodbye." The priestess leaves.

"What was the point of that?" They mumble, then hurry up the tree, trying not to think about how much everything hurts.

The scene that met them at the top wasn't exactly what they had been expecting—not that they knew what that was.
The rest of the group was looking up at a beautiful Sugar Swan, which was talking to them about something they couldn't hear.

"Uh, hey guys... not even gonna ask what I missed." They wave as they walk over.

"(C/F) Cookie!" Custard Cookie III cheers. "We broke a curse placed on the forest and the Sugar Swan!"

"I said I wasn't asking, but ok." They grimace.

The Sugar Swan appeared to be examining them.

"Uh, hi?" They say, nervously staring up at the powerful creature.

"I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO FIND PURE VANILLA COOKIE WITH THE HELP OF YOUR FRIEND." The

massive creature speaks.

"Wait," (C/F) Cookie sputters and then shouts, "What does that even mean?"

"MAKE HASTE COOKIES. GO TO THE BLUEBERRY YOGURT ACADEMY, WHERE PURE VANILLA COOKIE STUDIED MAGIC. THERE YOU WILL LEARN THE SPELL HE USED TO SEAL DARK ENCHANTRESS COOKIE AWAY."

Their eyes widen as everyone else nods.

Wait, where is White Lily Cookie?

"Understood, but what about you Sugar Swan?" Wizard Cookie asks.

"I WILL KEEP WATCH OVER THIS WORLD, SO THAT YOUR EFFORTS ARE NOT IN VAIN... NO CURSE SHALL TAINT THIS LAND."

"Come on (C/F) Cookie, now isn't the time to be standing around." Custard Cookie III drags their away from the magnificent bird and reminds them that the group actually travels.

"Oh! Right." They hurry along next to him.

"Are you ok?" He asks her.

"Yeah. I'm just a bit sore from not doing a lot of exercise for a while, then having a massive period where I did nothing, then immediately doing more walking and running than I have since my childhood." They sheepishly smile.

"Oh. I can help!" He says enthusiastically. "Ta-da!"
They had forgotten he was a healer.

"Thanks, that's so much better." They smile in relief.

"Where are we? What a spooky place..." GingerBrave looks around.

"Hmm... The Sugar Swan couldn't have pointed us in the wrong direction..." Wizard Cookie looks around.

They all wander into the Ghost City.

"Hello, do you want some—" The Ice Cream Ghost gasps, "(C/F) COOKIE?!"

"I... Woah! You remember me?" They sputter.

"How could I forget someone who's got 5 lifetime's worth of free ice cream?" The ghost smiles.

"WHAT?!" Everyone else gasps.

"Eh hehe...." The cookie in question bashfully looks at the ground, "They held an annual competition here when I lived here; one of the categories was a race."

"Wait, wait, stop." Wizard Cookie says, "You used to live here?!"

"Uh, yeah." They nod, "We can probably still go to my old house."

"You didn't tell us?" Strawberry Cookie tilts here head.

"You didn't ask. Anyone want ice cream?" They smile, taking a cone from the ghost.

"Yes please." Custard Cookie III raises his hand.

"Me too!" Strawberry Cookie smiles.

"Ah, you know what, everyone gets some! I don't care if you want it or not!" (C/F) Cookie smiles. While everyone else was getting theirs, they went and sat down on a bench near the edge of town, looking down the path to the Academy and reminiscing on days long gone.

"(C/F) Cookie, I hate to break your train of thought, but we do need to keep going." Wizard Cookie says.

"I know... it's just nice to be here again... Brings back memories from long before..." They sigh, smiling sadly.

"Like what?" GingerBrave inquires.

"Well, my friends and I used to come get ice cream, then sit here on

this bench. They always talked about school and how much more they'd like to do with magic, and I never really understood what they were talking about." They chuckle. "It was just nice to listen to them because I had nothing to say."

"No wonder you're so used to not knowing what's going on!" Chili Pepper Cookie laughs.

"I guess one could say that." They sigh.

"Say, do you know the way to the Academy (C/F) Cookie?" Wizard Cookie asks.

"Uhh, probably not anymore. A few... things happened to it and now it's probably different." They say, leaving out the fact that White Lily Cookie killed everyone in said Academy.

"Like what?" GingerBrave asks.

"...magic things." They say awkwardly.

"That answers nothing." Wizard Cookie grumbles.

"You'll find out if you go. But I don't know why the Sugar Swan pointed us this way... we definitely won't find Pure Vanilla Cookie here..." They frown.

"Come on! Let's get going!" GingerBrave smiles.

So they all head out of the town, (C/F) Cookie lingering for a moment to take another look at the place.

It was quite a bit of trekking along a familiar path until they found an odd cloaked, skeletal cookie.

(C/F) Cookie wasn't really paying attention, and was mostly just sticking with the group. Their mind was elsewhere though, thinking about all the time now gone.

So many times Pure Vanilla Cookie—later with White Lily Cookie—would sneak down to the city to say hello and just chat with them. They didn't know exactly when he'd first seen them, but they did

remember him introducing himself to them when they just so happened to cross paths getting ice cream.
He'd been so sweet and awkward. But in hindsight, he'd known a lot about them already... probably from the newspaper... hopefully from the newspaper. Did he even read the newspaper back then? He certainly read a lot of books and, later, as King he read the paper all the time to keep up with things going on in the kingdom...

"Uh, (C/F) Cookie?" Custard Cookie III snaps them from their thoughts, "Are you ok? You stopped."

"Hmm?" It took them a second to realize that they were indeed not moving, "Oh, whoops. I'm just thinking about someone."

"It's not White Lily Cookie is it?" Strawberry Cookie asks, "She took off just before you joined us at the top of the tree..."

"No... it's not. But now that I remember what we're doing it occurs to me that I lived next to the Academy for so long, and I only ever visited it once w—." They cut themself off from elaborating because they just remembered that was literally one of the first dates they had with Pure Vanilla Cookie.

"... You have a lot of secrets." Chili Pepper Cookie says.

"No, it's just one very big secret that relates to everything in my personal life... and everything else too."

"Oh! You! I remember you! You were friends with those two students, right? More than friends with one of them. He he."

They blush madly, "Possibly..."

"He he. Sweet Cookie, always wanted to see you. I wonder if he ever actually went to class." The Ferryman laughs.

"Hmm... he didn't." They snicker, "But he still got better grades than most who did."

"Woah! They must be really smart then!" Custard Cookie III gasps.

"Uh, yeah. He was." (C/F) Cookie fumbles with their hands.

"Do you wish to hear a rib-tickling joke?" The Ferryman's skeletal face grins, "Oh no. But you do not have any ribs?"

(C/F) Cookie snorts.

"That's absurd." Wizard Cookie scoffs angrily.

It was a short while after—and many defeated medusas— they reached their destination.

"Such a grand gate!" Custard Cookie III admires.

"The fence is pretty nice too." Chili Pepper Cookie adds.

"This must be the Blueberry Yogurt Academy!" GingerBrave cheers.

"Hmm... Smells like magic!" Wizard Cookie comments. Then tears begin to form in his eyes, "I can't believe it! To arrive at a magical source like this is a dream come true."

"I'm the Gatekeeper. I can't let you pass." Says a ghost none of them had noticed.

"Look at that! This ghost is very transparent!" GingerBrave exclaims. "I can walk right through him! Ha ha! Come here!" He leads the way through the gates as the group leaves the Gatekeeper Ghost in the dust.

"..." he stares after the Cookies, "Bye!"

6: Memories from an Eternity Ago

Once they actually entered the Academy gates a very different feeling fell upon (C/F) Cookie's mind. Dread.

Something was telling them that being here was a bad idea. That it would be much better if they left this place for good—not that anyone else in the group would even consider the idea. Custard Cookie III is too enamored with Pure Vanilla Cookie to pass up any opportunity to meet him, Wizard Cookie is amazed by the magic of the Academy, and everyone else would trust the Sugar Swan over them.

"Uh, hey guys?" They suddenly speak up, not knowing where they're going with this.

"Yeah?" Strawberry Cookie responses.

"Can I uh, explore the Academy grounds on my own?" They ask, "There is one place I'd like to visit."

"Be careful, and come back if you run into trouble." Wizard Cookie advises.

"Ok, thanks." They wander off the path.

"They seem sad." Custard Cookie III frowns.

"I'm certain that being here is very emotional for them." Wizard Cookie nods.

"And White Lily Cookie still hasn't come back..." Strawberry Cookie sighs. "To run away all of a sudden... I'm worried about her."

"To be honest, I'm worried too..." GingerBrave tells Strawberry Cookie, "But let's try to think positive, Strawberry Cookie! After all White Lily Cookie likes to travel alone! I'm sure she—and (C/F)

Cookie—will come back once they've sorted everything out!"

"He's right! As for us, we have this bush to get rid of." Chili Pepper Cookie frowns.

(C/F) Cookie sat down on the hill overlooking the starry river.

Pure Vanilla Cookie had brought them here when he first told them he loved them. It had been a beautiful night and he seemed to know just how to avoid all the teachers as they both had sat there.

"Did you love me?" They mumble to the empty spot beside them, as if hoping for an answer from someone who wasn't there.

They gently pick up a stone resting beside them, and jump at the familiar voice.

"With all my heart."

"What." They look around, only to realize that this must be some sort of spell, as the messy-haired blonde student with his pointy hat was on their other side, with them as a significantly younger child.

"Oh, come on. You're just saying that!" A much younger version of themself replies.

"I'm not though!" He insists.

They look around the scene more closely, looking up to the now well-kept path. They gape as they realize that child White Lily Cookie was watching the two kids from up by a bush.

"Lily WHY!" They exclaim, "Why would you spy on our date!!" They bury their face in their hands for how embarrassing it was to realize that she'd been watching the whole thing.

After watching one of White Lily Cookie's memories, Strawberry Cookie suddenly has an epiphany.

"Hey! I think I just realized what (C/F) Cookie's secret is!" She exclaims.

"Really?" Wizard Cookie gasps, "How?"

"Well, they've been avoiding the topic of the Vanilla Kingdom and knew what it was; they knew White Lily Cookie; and the Ferryman said they were friends with two of the students at the Academy, which they lived by and White Lily Cookie went to." Strawberry Cookie explains.

"You're not suggesting what I think you are?" Wizard Cookie's eyes widen.

"Maybe the other student they knew was Pure Vanilla Cookie!" She finishes.

"No way! Why would they hide that?!" Custard Cookie III yells.

"Yeah, why would they hide that?" Chili Pepper Cookie agrees.

"Maybe we should ask them the next time we see them..." GingerBrave suggests, "After all, there really doesn't seem like there's a reason to hide that."

(C/F) Cookie digs through the mountains of papers in the greenhouse, ignoring White Lily Cookie staring at them from the mirror.

"(C/F) Cookie, I'm really not sure why you're so mad..." She tries to get their attention and fails.

"There are so many things everyone just kept from me, aren't there?!" They grumble, "You two only spoke in terminology you knew I wouldn't get! There's something the two of you didn't want me to know!"

"(C/F) Cookie!" White Lily Cookie exclaims, "Can you just calm down and try to talk to me about this?"

"Calm down?" They snap back, "I'm having an absolute crisis right now! I leave a powerful seal because a child who can open it HAPPENS to stand too close to it, I found out that everything I knew is gone, and now I know that one of my best friends was spying on my relationship with my boyfriend! I have every right to

be upset!"

"(C/F) Cookie... you won't find what you're looking for in the greenhouse..." She says guiltily. "There's nothing here."

"You think I'm just going to believe a liar!" They shake their head, "What else did you spy on, huh? Is there anything else I should know about?"

"I don't know!" White Lily Cookie yells, "I really don't! But we never talked about you in the greenhouse! Maybe you need to look in the gardens, or the library! I don't know (C/F) Cookie! But I do have a feeling you won't like the answer, no matter what you find..."

They stare at her, trying to make sense of such a cryptic warning. They angrily push the door to the greenhouse open and storm out, sprinting along the path out of anger for a lack of answers.

"Hey (C/F) Cookie— oh." Chili Pepper Cookie drops the cheerful attitude with one look at their face. "What happened to you?"

"I don't want to talk about it." They frown angrily.

"Well, we have something we want to ask you!" Custard Cookie III smiles, clearly not realizing that now was not a good time. "Did you know Pure Vanilla Cookie?"

They sigh, "I thought I did... but I'm starting to question everything I thought I knew..."

"So you knew him and White Lily Cookie when they were at school here?" GingerBrave says, totally in awe.

"We would get ice cream together, yeah." They smile gently at the memory. "White Lily Cookie joined Pure Vanilla Cookie and myself after we'd known each other for a few months actually."

"And you didn't mention this sooner?!" Chili Pepper Cookie yells.

"It's not something I want to talk about, especially not right now. I'm looking for a memory stone thingy..." They change the subject.

"Oh! We've found a few if those!" Strawberry Cookie smiles, "Maybe we can help you look for yours!"

"No, no, absolutely not. It has something both White Lily Cookie and myself definitely don't want you knowing about just yet." They shake their head, "In fact, I'm going to search the gardens. Don't wait for me." They walk back towards the overgrown bushes and flowers.

"Ok, yeah, there's definitely more to this story." Wizard Cookie says, suspiciously gazing after (C/F) Cookie.

"What? Are you saying we betray the Royal Scout's trust and go after them?" Custard Cookie III frowns. "As king, I'd never want to betray the trust of my subjects! I say we keep going!"

"Yeah, (C/F) Cookie turned down our help. We should respect that decision and just keep looking for White Lily Cookie's memories this way." Strawberry Cookie nods.

"Yeah, if they don't want us to know, then why should we betray their trust like that!" GingerBrave agrees.

"And I am not going back into those bushes!" Chili Pepper Cookie adds.

"Ok, ok! I get it, I'm out-voted." Wizard Cookie rolls his eyes, "Let's just keep going."

(C/F) Cookie scans the ground as they quickly move around the slugs that infest the garden.

Honestly, was the memory just not here?

"Gah!" They yell, "This is pointless!" They kick a rock and sputter as that turns out to be the memory. It goes flying to the other side of the hedge.

Thankfully the slugs fled with how loud they were.

They awkwardly walk around the hedge and grab the gem-like rock, going back around. Muffled voices filled the garden as they

did.

"Are you even listening to yourself?" White Lily Cookie yells at Pure Vanilla Cookie. "You sound insane!"

"I can't lose them! I love them too much to let them go!" Pure Vanilla Cookie's hat was missing and his hair looked messier than his child-self's usual.

"Pure Vanilla Cookie! What you're suggesting is absurd! You can't just hide away with them forever! Holding them against their will isn't any better than just crumbling them yourself! You'd not only ruin your life, but theirs too!"

"Who would stop me?" He snaps back.

"I WOULD!" She yells at him.

(C/F) Cookie looks between the two silent students.

"Pure Vanilla Cookie... this isn't healthy..." White Lily Cookie frowns, concern visible on her face.

He, on the other hand, seemed so confused by what she was saying.

"I get that I don't understand your feelings, but I'm wondering if I need to see a teacher about a love potion antidote for everything I've just heard you say to me." She continues.

"I didn't drink a love potion—"

"You didn't? Nothing of what you just said sounded like something you'd ever say Pure Vanilla Cookie!" She shouts at him, "This isn't like you at all..."

He remains silent.

"But, I don't want to lose you as my friend." She sighs, "Which is why I'm going to help you!"

"W-what?" Pure Vanilla Cookie stutters.

"I mean, if you're so sure you didn't have a love potion, the amount of time you've spent with them proves that you really do love them, and I don't want you actually doing any of the horrible things you just said you'd do for them..."

"What the?" The present time Cookie—who was obviously never supposed to know about this conversation—looks between the two kids.

"Are—" He starts.

"No, we are not going to give them a love potion." White Lily Cookie shuts down the idea. "I'd feel guilty the rest of my life because then their love for you would be fake."

"Then what are...?" Pure Vanilla Cookie trails off.

"Well, I'm going to help you get together the normal way!" She grins.

"Wait, what?" Pure Vanilla Cookie gasps.

"I mean, you love them, right? And they're good friends with you! If I help then you won't hurt anyone, and it's completely their choice for going out with you!"

"Hmm, yeah. I guess that does make sense." He smiles slightly, then that smile disappears, "But White Lily Cookie..." His expression becomes serious and he opens his eyes to know just how serious he was, "If this fails, I will take them away with me and I will crumble you."

She nods in fear.

(C/F) Cookie sits down as the scene disappears.

"She was watching to make sure she didn't have to go for help..." They mutter to themself. "She knew the whole time that he was going to crumble her if I said no; she knew he would crumble everyone! But she made sure I had a choice... would he have just taken me away if she hadn't stepped in?"

Still holding the memory tightly in hand, they sprint to catch up with GingerBrave and the rest.

"Hey! (C/F) Cookie! Your back!" Custard Cookie III cheers. "Did you find what you were looking for?"

"Yeah..."

"Oh... are you ok?" The child "king" asks them, concern evident in his expression.

"I don't know." They shake their head. "White Lily Cookie was right. I don't like the answer I got. I should never have come here..."

"Well, we just beat the Librarian, so we're moving this way." Custard Cookie III laughs, trying to change the subject.

"You know, you're nothing like Pure Vanilla Cookie..." They frown, following beside him.

"I'm not?" He tears up at those words.

"No... you've got your heart written on your sleeve, and intention paved in golden cheese. You're sweet... he was vanilla." They smile at him.

"... what does that mean?" He asks.

"It's sweet until you taste it. A flavor of lies, if you will."

"That's not what my dad told me at all!" He shouts. "Pure Vanilla Cookie was a kind king and did nothing but good for his people!"

"Well, yeah, but that doesn't mean that he didn't have... problems. No Cookie is completely perfect, not even the greatest kings."

"Hello (C/F) Cookie, I see you found what we were looking for." White Lily Cookie cuts in their conversation.

"Yeah... and I owe you an apology. I didn't understand, but now that I do, I wish I didn't." They nod.

"No, you needed to know. It puts a lot of the things you've been thinking about into a bigger perspective..." She shakes her head.

"Watch your step!" Wizard Cookie shouts.

"Ew! Sticky smoky goo on the floor!" Custard Cookie III looks down at the floor in disgust.

"Sometimes chemists experiment with dangerous substances. Make sure not to touch anything!" Wizard Cookie warns. "And (C/F) Cookie, I think you should stick with us until we get out of the lab. I don't think we, or you, want to accidentally step in chemicals by going too fast."

"Makes sense." They shrug, realizing that White Lily Cookie was gone again.

They just follow behind the group, absentmindedly staring down at the memory in their hands from time to time. They could tell that all the memories the group encountered were after they had started dating Pure Vanilla Cookie because he seemed far more upbeat and cheerful in them—the way he had been during that time while still here.
But obviously they were getting closer to when White Lily Cookie turned the entire school into ghosts.

"Uh..." Reaching the end of the lab and following Wizard Cookie's summary of events they remember, (C/F) Cookie speaks up, "I'm gonna go on ahead, I'll come back and report what I find."

"Ok, it seems like we're leaving the lab so that should be fine." Wizard Cookie nods.

They run ahead.

"Do you think (C/F) Cookie knows what happened?" Strawberry Cookie asks.

"Probably." Chili Pepper Cookie scoffs, "I mean, we had to piece together that they knew Pure Vanilla Cookie... so maybe they just don't want to say."

"It must be something really bad then." Custard Cookie III frowns.

"Hey, uh, so there's a massive hammer boss around a few corners..." The Cookies are startled to hear (C/F) Cookie's voice.

"That was fast!" Custard Cookie III gasps.

"Uh, I guess...?" They shrug, "I think I feel better about everything I've learned in the past few hours now... it helps everything make more sense."

"Good to hear!" GingerBrave smiles, "And good to know that there's a super tough enemy pretty close by..."

"No, there is still a bit more road, I just thought you should know that there is something stronger coming up. I'm gonna keep going ahead." They shake their head as they turn to leave again.

"I don't think they're ok..." Strawberry Cookie says sadly.

"Yeah, they seem upset." GingerBrave agrees. "Maybe we should try to catch up to them..."

"If we can." Wizard Cookie shakes his head. "Let's go."

(C/F) Cookie sighs as they sit down next to the moonstone.
The last major enemy (who they were pretty sure was the principal once, they had seen his face next to fliers for the school) had tried to stop them from reaching here, but must've assumed they had no power to break the moonstone. To be fair, they don't...

"(C/F) Cookie...?" White Lily Cookie's voice pulls them from any thought they had. "Do you know what happened here?"

"Yeah." They nod, "Do you want me to tell you? You probably won't like my answer."

"Please, do." She nods.

"You opened a nightmare and it turned everyone here into ghosts and bound them here." They state.

"But... I thought..." She looks close to crying, "Oh!"

"Hmm?"

"I remember now!" White Lily Cookie gasps, "I remember what happened! (C/F) Cookie, I know why I didn't come back."

"What?" They go pale as they see the horror on her face.

"I saw the witches. I saw their feast. I saw the truth." She cries, "The witches were eating Cookies! (C/F) Cookie... Cookies are made to be eaten!"

They go pale at yet another terrifying piece of information today. They covered their mouth with their hands—undoubtedly if they had eaten something recently it would've just been vomited up again.

Then everyone else got there before they had recovered.

"Whoah! I've been to jewelry vaults but I've never seen such a big gem!" Chili Pepper Cookie laughs, "MINE! ALL MINE! No touchy! MINE MINE MINE!"

"Hmm... that's a moonstone..." Wizard Cookie examines it. "We're talking Dark Moon Magic here, folks... It's a forbidden school of magic that draws its power from the dark side of the moon!"

"Oh no! Poor White Lily Cookie!" Strawberry Cookie says. "She's trapped inside the moonstone!"

Everyone's voices were blending together, but they were so stressed out to really understand the conversation.

"—We'll smash this moonstone and you'll be free!" GingerBrave says.

"NO!" They yell. "DON'T BREAK THE MOONSTONE!"

"Huh?" GingerBrave stops, "Why?"

They're too scared to speak. The terror and stress finally getting to

them. They passed out, collapsing beside the moonstone.

7: Hello Dear

They shot up, wishing that everything was just a horrible nightmare and they'd wake up in bed beside Pure Vanilla Cookie.

But instead they were in a dark and half-dead forest.

"(C/F) Cookie!" Custard Cookie III wraps them into a tight hug, "Are you ok? You didn't get hurt by Dark Enchantress Cookie did you? Should I heal you just to be sure."

They don't say anything.

"Before you passed out you told us not to break the moonstone." Strawberry Cookie says, "Did you know that White Lily Cookie was Dark Enchantress Cookie?"

"What?" They spoke quietly.

"Yeah, apparently White Lily Cookie is Dark Enchantress Cookie." Chili Pepper Cookie frowns. "She tried to destroy us."

"Here." Custard Cookie III helps them to their feet. "I'll heal you."

"Thank you." They rub their head as the headache they had goes away. "What else happened?"

"Uh, nothing really." GingerBrave shrugs, "Nothing we really know at least."

"Where are we?" They ask, looking around the landscape.

"No idea!" GingerBrave smiles awkwardly.

"Uh, good to know." They nod slowly.

"We were going to keep moving after you woke up." Wizard Cookie explains, "So we'd like to get going."

"Uh, ok." They let go of Custard Cookie III (who had still been supporting them) and start walking, feeling an odd familiarity with the path.

"Where are you going?" Custard Cookie III yells after them, as everyone scrabbles to catch up.

"It's this way."

"What is?!" Chili Pepper Cookie yells.

"No idea."

"Then maybe we shouldn't walk in random directions?" Wizard Cookie reasons.

"..." They look back at the group, "Uh, alright. You guys can pick a random direction and go that way. I'm going this way."

"Uh, they do have a point." Strawberry Cookie shrugs, "There isn't any indication of where we're supposed to go, and this way seems like it has a path..."

"Thank you Strawberry Cookie." They smile. "I can look on ahead though if you're so worried."

"That would be great, thanks (C/F) Cookie." GingerBrave grins.

They start running through the trees, carefully looking around now that they weren't entirely certain of the way.
It took maybe thirty seconds before they had to dodge a raisin crow that swooped down to peck them.

"Oh crumbs no..." They start running from the crows—which quickly discover that the Cookie is faster than them—until they tripped on a rock and face planted, sliding across the ground for a few seconds before coming to a stop.

"Oh no, are you alright dear?"

They instinctively raise a hand to signal they're (somewhat) ok.

"Ha ha. Here." Familiar, gentle hands help them to their feet. "That looked like a nasty fall."

"I—"

"Healer Cookie!" A Cookie they didn't know came running up to them.

"Black Raisin Cookie, do not worry. It's alright." The Cookie supporting them says. They sound exactly like him.

"But... this—"

"I do not sense any danger from them."

"Uh, hi?" (C/F) Cookie cuts into this conversation, "Who are you?"

"I could ask you the same thing, outsider!"
They just realized that the Cookie before them has a crow resting on her arm.

"I'm (C/F) Cookie... um..." They feel the stranger's hold on them somewhat possessively tighten, "Wait, did you tell the crows to chase me?"

"Indeed, you must be fast to be able to outrun them." She still seems suspicious of them, not that (C/F) Cookie could blame her. "But why are you here?"

"No idea."

"Black Raisin Cookie... I don't think all the questioning is really necessary."

"Healer Cookie... I do not trust the intentions of outsiders easily. You know that. Why did you leave the village?"

"Oh, I thought I heard someone shouting for me and I came to see if I was needed." There is no hesitation in his answer.
Wait... Did he just lie to her?

"Alright then." The crow-bearing stranger sighs, "What about this?"

She offers (C/F) Cookie a raisin bun.

"Well what about it? Can I have it?" They ask, looking between the bread and her face, "Is this like some sort of trick where if I take it that's wrong or...?"

"Huh?" She, and her crow, seemed taken aback by the response. "It's not common that outsiders like raisin buns."

"I haven't eaten in days and my mental state is in shambles; yes, I want the raisin bun."

"Hmm, maybe you are trustworthy." She says thoughtfully, giving them the raisin bun.

"Thank you."

"I'll take them back to the village." The other Cookie, which they still hadn't really gotten to look at states, using his hold on them to guide them.

"Uh-" They try to cut in and tell both the other Cookies about GingerBrave and co., but they are ignored.

"Alright, I will keep up on patrolling." She nods.

They do not have a choice in this... and frankly dying because they speak up doesn't seem like a good plan.

"You don't have to carry me." They hint to tell the stranger to let go.

"Well, I don't want you to fall again, or get lost." He objects.

"I'm not that helpless! I mean, you'd run too if you got chased by a flock of birds." They frown angrily at his refusal.

He doesn't say anything, but it's not the 'awkward avoid the topic' not saying anything. He was clearly thinking about something else and paid their rhetorical statement no mind.

They grumble in frustration at his lack of reply.

"Hmm? Oh." He chuckles, "I assure you that I will let you go once we reach my tent, I just don't want... It's dangerous out here and I don't want you to run into danger unknowingly."

Something about what he just said made them feel small details were purposely left out...

"Like...?"

"Why do you think Black Raisin Cookie patrols so much?"

"I'm asking you!"

It's odd really. How much this Cookie was like him.
Fast and conversation-ending replies, taking every opportunity to get them to change their mind and take his side, the same nickname, and even the way he held them...

Who is this Cookie?

Is this just him without the robes and silly cone hat?

"Are you alright dear? Do you want me to carry you?"

"Uh, no." They answer quickly.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes!"
He's already practically carrying them and they had literally just asked him to let go!

"You're practically dragging your legs."

"Because I wouldn't want to go too fast for you!"
This was true. This was taking a painfully long time because they did not want to run him over by going any faster; their "walking" pace would probably do just that.

"Well, it certainly seems like it's uncomfortable to have your legs dragged behind you." He reasons.

"Why do you want to carry me?" They ask a perfectly reasonable and legitimate question... which he takes as an invitation to carry them.

"I promise that I am very careful." He smiles.

Oh crumbs, this Cookie even looks like him! Though the bandages make it a bit hard to tell...
His messy, and somewhat dirty, blonde hair was almost identical to the memory of him back during his schooling days, but the silly hat was missing and the cloak he was wearing has definitely seen better days.

They frown and huff angrily at his action, but they realize that he clearly knew what he was doing because they didn't even realize he had a staff up until just now when they noticed it—also bandaged at the top, conveniently where Pure Vanilla Cookie's vanilla orchid staff had a recognizable eye.

Wait, when did they get to this tent? Were they that lost in thought again?! What on Earthbread is wrong with them? No sane Cookie does this much zoned out thinking!

They feel oddly relaxed as he sets them down close to the middle of the tent. Then he was quickly crowded with injured Cookies, each clearly needing serious care.

What did that to all of them?

They don't know what to say, so they just stay quiet.
It was amazing how fast running into this reminder of him brought them instantly backsliding into all the doubt and insecurity they had like the trip to the Academy had never happened.

They just hope that their traveling friends don't get crumbled by the crows.

They frown, finally giving in to a horrible feeling in their gut—one telling them to leave. Standing up, they make their way through the mass of injured Cookies to the tent entrance, sitting down to watch through it.

It felt oddly like staring out their bedroom window...

"Are you alright?" Suddenly the stranger, who had still not given them his name, lays a hand on their shoulder and they jump wildly.

"Oh, uh, yeah." They take a few deep breaths, "I'm just waiting for someone."

"Who?" He asks.

"Oh, well I've actually been traveling with some nice Cookies who were also coming this way. I hope they're not too worried about me..." They think about what the rest might think about them not coming back...

("I'll ask one more time! Where is (C/F) Cookie?" Chili Pepper Cookie demands from the Cookie friend of the crows.

"...that fast Cookie?" She gasps, "What do you want with them?"

"They're our friend." GingerBrave explains, "They went on ahead and haven't come back..."

"Hmm, then maybe you can prove how trustworthy you are."

"Sure we can! What do we need to do?" GingerBrave grins.

"Simple task: eat this!"

"EW! RAISIN BUNS!")

"I'm certain they're fine!" The healer grins, "But you haven't sustained any injuries have you?"

"Hmm, that depends. Does injured pride count?"

He laughs at the joke, obviously knowing they meant the fact that they face planted because of a rock. "Not something I can heal, but certainly a wound nonetheless. Perhaps a bit of rest will help you feel better. There isn't much space, but I'm certain I can help you get comfortable."

"Uh, I'm not really tired." They shrug. They felt a bit uneasy of him, but after what they had found out yesterday about the Cookie they had loved so dearly—and the fact that he reminded them so much of him—that made sense.
They also weren't tired because they had basically just woken up! Sure, that was passing out from being so stressed out, but that doesn't make it much different.

Oh yeah! They almost forgot what White Lily Cookie told them! What a terrifying truth! They will probably never mentally recover from their entire experience at the Academy.

"Dear?"

They are once again startled by his gentle touch. "What?"

"Are you sure you're alright?" He asks quietly, sitting down beside them to be at their level.

"Yeah." Even they knew they answered too quickly to sound honest.

"I don't believe you." He frowns. "Do you not want to talk about it?"

"I don't."
Why would they tell this complete stranger their problems?

"Ah, ok." He nods, "I understand. But you are welcome to talk to me if you need to."
He seemed disappointed...
"I'll leave you alone then." He stood up and went back to what he was doing before. ...Though they could tell he was keeping an eye on them.

They continue looking outside and waiting for their friends to catch up, but pretty soon their mind wandered.

They hadn't heard the whole conversation that White Lily Cookie and Pure Vanilla Cookie had had. They clearly missed the first part of it, and it definitely was a list of terrible things Pure Vanilla Cookie was willing to do for their love... did he ever actually go through with any of them? Sure, White Lily Cookie had prevented him from ruining their life by helping push the two of them

together, but that doesn't mean he never did anything at all.

Come to think of it, there were a few times they could remember some Cookie causally telling them that someone had gotten removed from the castle or sent to do something and never came back. He usually said that those were accidents or just their decision, but now (C/F) Cookie wasn't sure.

Was everyone else aware of his total obsession with them? Was leaving them in the dark to protect everyone? Well, look at how terrified they are now that they know! It is likely they would've ran if they knew! That... definitely would've resulted in something bad...

"(C/F) COOKIE!"

They're tackled by Custard Cookie III, which causes their train of thought to crash.

"AAH! Oh, hi Custard Cookie." They pat his head once they realize it's just him.

"We were so worried when you didn't come back! We thought those Wafflebots had gotten you!" The child cries.

"No! No they didn't! D-Don't cry! I'm fine really! Wait, Wafflebots?" They fail to console the child.

"Yeah! The whole forest is full of them!" Chili Pepper Cookie cuts in. "Wait, are you really crying over them?"

"So what if I am!" Custard Cookie III shouts at her.

"Quiet. Please." The healer seems to appear behind them. "My patients need quiet." He takes in the scene of Custard Cookie III lying on top of (C/F) Cookie— who had fallen over with how hard the child had flung himself on them— and Chili Pepper Cookie just standing next to them. "Why are you...?"

Custard Cookie III sobs, hugging (C/F) Cookie tighter.

"This is my life now." They chuckle.

"I got it." Chili Pepper Cookie tries to pry the kid off them, with little success.
"Let... go of them!"

"No!!! I'm never letting go!" Custard Cookie III cries.

(C/F) Cookie snickers, "Custard Cookie, you may rip me in half with how tightly you're—"

The healer easily reaches under them and pulls the child's arms off them.
Everyone else is surprised by this.

"He didn't hold you too tight, did he?" He asks like he didn't just do that.

"N-no."

"Good." He walks back to his patients.

"Who is that Cookie?" They mumble to the others beside them.

"Healer Cookie." Chili Pepper Cookie tells them, "Did he not introduce himself to you?"

"To be fair, Black Raisin Cookie introduced him to us." Custard Cookie III shrugs.

"He acts like he's known me for a long time..." (C/F) Cookie frown, "Which... he does remind me of someone I know, but..."

"But what?" She asks them.

"I really hope it's not him."

"Why?" Custard Cookie III asks, "Wouldn't it be good to see your friend again?"

"No... but White Lily Cookie was right."

"Huh?"

They don't answer what they meant.

"Are you really tending all these Cookies by yourself?" Strawberry Cookie asks Healer Cookie.

"Yes! He can work miracles!" Black Raisin Cookie says enthusiastically. "Almost every Cookie in our village has their wounds tended by Healer Cookie."

"Almost." (C/F) Cookie repeats, realizing that she is missing an arm.

"Though I find myself cleaning up after many of Black Raisin Cookie's shenanigans. He he." Healer Cookie laughs.

"I was just complimenting you!" She coughs, flushing in embarrassment.

The conversation goes on, not that (C/F) Cookie was paying much attention, until Custard Cookie said something that confirmed a suspicion they had had the whole time.

"Technically, my magic is also a treasure passed down from the Vanilla Kingdom!"

"You said that Wafflebot are what are causing all these horrible injuries..." (C/F) Cookie cuts in, "Those are the ice cream robots that were created to assist the Cookies of the Vanilla Kingdom, yes?"

"How would you know?" Black Raisin Cookie gasps.

"(C/F) Cookie is from the Vanilla Kingdom!" Custard Cookie answers for them.

"..." They internally curse his inability to keep secrets. This information isn't exactly something they want thrown around everywhere...

"You know where it is?" GingerBrave gasps.

"Well, if it is indeed those same Wafflebots, I assume it would be where those are coming from... and uh, if they're attacking Cookies that must mean they've all gone haywire or uh... let's just hope it's the first option."

Strawberry Cookie shudders, clearly recognizing what they meant.

"The point is that if you can stop the source of whatever is doing that from sending more you can likely put a stop to the attacks altogether." They explain.

"I... I never even thought about that." Black Raisin Cookie says thoughtfully, "But I don't have the strength to fight that many at once."

"How would we get there?" Wizard Cookie asks.

"Hmm, if what you're saying is true, then we'll have to go up to the Castle in the Sky." Healer Cookie says thoughtfully.

"CASTLE IN THE SKY?!" GingerBrave and the rest, aside from Custard Cookie III, yell.

"But the Vanilla Kingdom would never attack other Cookies..." Custard Cookie III frowns.

"I'm not saying that's not true, but you've never been there and I haven't been there since before the Dark Flour War—and it was also missing for a long time—so it's very possible that it's under new management." They point out.

"It did appear above the Raisin Cliffs just a few moons ago..." Healer Cookie agrees.

"Moons...?" They mumble to themself. Had Pure Vanilla Cookie been freed for that long and not looked for them?

Actually... it would probably be a good thing if he had... but that would mean—

A horrible screech comes from outside.

"Oh no..." Healer Cookie gasps. "The crimson moon!"

"BLACK RAISIN COOKIE HURRY! WE NEED YOU NEAR THE CLIFFS!" A villager yells.

"What's going on?!" She hurries out of the tent.

"The crimson moon! The sky is opening up again!" The Cookie tells her.

"We're coming with her!" GingerBrave tells the rest, "Black Raisin Cookie could use our help!" They hurry after her.

(C/F) Cookie frowns, staring after them.

"Please (C/F) Cookie, come inside." Healer Cookie lays a hand on their shoulder, "I don't want you to get hurt..."

They take a deep breath, then run after the rest of them.

"Dear wait!" He yells after them.

They don't look back.

8: Abandoned Millenia

The sound of chaos pointed them to the Raisin Cliffs. There were Wafflebots everywhere, and Cookies desperately trying to defeat them.

(C/F) Cookie had to constantly be moving to not get crunched by waffle swords or splashed with ice cream.

Clearly this was not a place for someone who could not hold their own in battle.

Somehow they got up on top of a massive boulder, still completely uninjured. "STOOOP!"

Silence.

Only the gentle whirring of the boys could be heard, all else was still.

"What did you do?" Black Raisin Cookie gasps, looking around wide eyed.

"What do you mean 'what did you do'? I didn't do—" They gasp too as it dons on them.

The Wafflebots had stopped attacking.

"The failsafe..." They mumble, "It's still programmed into them."

"The what?" One of the villagers gasps.

"In the event that they went haywire, an emergency program was written to override all other systems and do as I told them to. The engineers said it was because I was the only one fast enough to get there before anyone gets hurt... but I'd have thought it would be taken out by whoever took over them..." They explain thoughtfully.

"Then.. what now?" Wizard Cookie looks around at the frozen bits,

"Now that they've been neutralized it would still be a good idea to smash all their cores. Just to make sure they won't power on and attack us all over again.

"I'll go locate the portal to the Castle." (C/F) Cookie nods, "I don't think you need to come with me, it I will come back once I find it."

"Ok!" Strawberry Cookie nods, smashing one of the Wafflebot's cores with her lollipop.

They sprinted in the direction of a faint path, until they came to an odd hole in the ground, one that felt magic, but wasn't an active portal.

"What now?" They ask rhetorically to no one, frowning at the lack of portal.

"(C/F) Cookie!" Healer Cookie yells behind them.

They stiffen, but quickly turn to face him, seeing that he is very out of breath and he looked significantly brighter than he did earlier.

"You shouldn't have run off like that. You could've gotten hurt!"

"I didn't." They shrug, "I'm perfectly fine actually. Not a single scratch on me the whole adventure."

He frowns, clearly not believing them.

"Why do you even care so much?"

"I—" He starts.

"Healer Cookie! (C/F) Cookie! There you are!" GingerBrave yells.

Healer Cookie grimaces, clearly not wanting this conversation to be over. It almost held murderous intent. Almost, a very important word.

"Hey guys. I found a hole." They say, pointing at the hole.

"What good is that going to do?" Chili Pepper Cookie asks, laughing.

"Let me see." Healer Cookie walks over to their side.

"Huh? Healer Cookie, look!" GingerBrave exclaims, "The ground is glowing with every step you take!"

"I think that has to do with the gemstone from earlier." Healer Cookie gasps, "My staff is getting warmer and warmer as well."

"Ok... I missed that." (C/F) Cookie frowns. "Oh the hole is now a portal."

"I think I understand." Wizard Cookie marvels, "That gem has unlocked the portal."

"Look, columns of pure light have appeared. Everyone ready? Grab the Cookie next to you and don't let go!"

Somehow for (C/F) Cookie this was only Healer Cookie. His grip is so tight they worried he'd break their hand clean off.

So that's how he got Custard Cookie off them so easily...

"I'm as ready as can be!" GingerBrave nods, "This is it, guys!"

"I'm not scared." Wizard Cookie agrees, "After all, this is magic from the Vanilla Kingdom!"

"Where there's treasure, there's ME! LET'S GO!" Chili Pepper Cookie exclaims.

"I can hear the fanfare already!" Custard Cookie III cheers, "Hold on, Vanilla Kingdom! Your king is coming!"

"Wait...! Black Raisin Cookie!" The Villager Cookies gather around the portal.
"Take this! It's not much, but it's a lil somethin' for the road..." they hand her a bag of jellies.
"We've been saving some jellies every day..."

"How did–When did–But there wasn't enough food to begin with... I... I don't know what to say. Thank you. I will do everything to return peace to our village!" She takes it from them.

"And I'll come back as a better and stronger healer!" Healer Cookie smiles, "Until then, take care, everyone!"

"Black Raisin Cookie! Healer Cookie! We'll be waiting!" The Cookies wave the group goodbye.
"D-don't forget to bring back souvenirs...!"

"Time to jump into the portal!" GingerBrave yells, "Vanilla Kingdom... here we come!"

"Are we absolutely certain this is a good–WOAH!" (C/F) Cookie tries to reason the safety of jumping into a random portal, but Healer Cookie drags them with him into it.

The streets were a little destroyed–utterly destroyed–but otherwise exactly how they remembered them. Probably because of the Dark Flour War... Definitely because of the Dark Flour War.

GingerBrave gasps, "We finally made it to the Vanilla Kingdom!"

"Behold, denizens of the Vanilla Kingdom! For I, Custard Cookie the third, descendant of the king, have arrived!" Custard Cookie III cheers, "SOUND THE FANFARE!"

Wizard Cookie almost starts ranting on the beauty of the rubble, but doesn't even get to start because (C/F) Cookie speaks up.

"There's no one here." They point out, "I imagine everyone fled because of the war that happened here."

"They do have a point..." Healer Cookie agrees, frowning. "But we shouldn't make assumptions!"

"What Cookie is going to stick around when there's an evil army destroying everything in sight?" They yell.

"I agree; that would explain why it's so quiet." Black Raisin Cookie nods, "But don't forget why we're here. (C/F) Cookie, you can immobilize the bots and the rest of us can take them out once they've stopped attacking us."

"I can help as well with some of the spells I know." Healer Cookie

adds.

"There's something familiar about this place..." Strawberry Cookie says, looking around, "But, it's a bit different from what I imagined."

"Strawberry Cookie, do you feel that way as well?" Healer Cookie does the same, "I sense a hint of... yes, something in the air. As if butter has aged rather too long..."

"Psh, what're you talking about?!" Chili Pepper Cookie grins, "All I smell is GOLD! Now... where are they?! It's time for the heist of the century!"

"I'll tell you after the Wafflebots are defeated, deal?" (C/F) Cookie chuckles nervously.

"You better make good on that deal." She sneers.

"Don't forget why we're here. I get that you're all excited, but keep your guard up at all times." Black Raisin Cookie says, annoyance evident in her voice.

The group begins making their way through the streets, and it was only as they were about halfway to the Hangar that (C/F) Cookie realized that Healer Cookie had never let go of their hand, but his hold was so gentle and familiar that they would've easily overlooked it.

"Wouldn't the Cookies have come back here?" He mumbles.

"The entire kingdom literally appeared in the sky only a short time ago," They remind him, "That isn't enough time for anyone to have come back. We're definitely the only ones here."

The healer frowns, then smiles a little, giving their hand a slight squeeze.

"Are... are you ok?" They ask him.

"Yes... I just... I–"

Their conversation is interrupted by the loud sound of tile cracking

under Wizard Cookie's feet.

"I told you so... Tread lightly." Black Raisin Cookie frowns, "These tiles you admire so much are breaking away."

"Hmm... Upon closer inspection, it looks like these tiles were actually damaged by an external force, not by the passage of time. Perhaps they were damaged during the Dark Flour War..."

"Were none of you paying attention in the Pilgrim's Village?" (C/F) Cookie gasps, "Not that I'm blaming Black Raisin Cookie or Healer Cookie, but they did say that the entire Vanilla Kingdom disappeared following the war..."

"So maybe when it appeared in the sky it was exactly how it disappeared!" Strawberry Cookie gasps. "There hasn't been any Cookies to fix the roads!"

"We can't just leave them like this!" GingerBrave shakes his head, "Let's fix up the holes in the road."

While the five adventurers and Healer Cookie went to gather supplies around to fix the roads, (C/F) Cookie took the moment to speak to Black Raisin Cookie.

"This probably feels like such a waste of time to you..." They frown, "Sorry."

"It's not that big of a deal. We aren't being attacked at least." She says solemnly. "How do you know so much about this place?"

"I used to live here." They confess.

"Hmm..." She nods, but then looks over them more carefully.

"Admittedly," They continue, not really understanding her thought process, "I would've been more than happy to never see this place again."

"Really?" She gasps, "Why? Your companions seem to worship this place."

"..." They try to think of how best to explain. "It's more or less about a few things I've learned for myself while traveling with them. I'm too afraid to go into detail... but I worry that I may never be able to leave this place if I stay for long."

"..." She shares a look with her crow before voicing a question that had clearly been nagging at her gut, "Do you know why Healer Cookie seems so fond of you?"

"E-elaborate please?" They hope they didn't look as pale as they felt.

"He trusted you so blindly, he even went out to get you–almost like he knew you were coming! He's barely taken his eyes off you since we got here!" She explains, the crow on her arm taking flight due to the force of her exasperation. "And, when you've gone far enough ahead that we can't see you, he's had a rather strange expression."

"The nickname... the light... even this..." They list then gasp, "Oh crumbs, the two of them are the same Cookie aren't they!" Putting two and two together has never been so terrifying!

"Are you ok? You're shaking..." She reaches out to them.

"I need to go." They say quickly, taking off down the broken street.

They don't look back as they hear Black Raisin Cookie yell after them.

In less than a minute they had to slow down to not crash into a mound of smashed waffle cone and ice cream.

"What on Earthbread?" They poke the ice cream of the scraps.

"Hey! What are you doing here?"

They look around, unable to find the one who yelled.

"Uh, hello? Over here!"

They spot the tiny Cookie with a weird headset giving them an annoyed stare.

"What are you doing?" The tiny one asks.

"I should ask you that... I thought there was no one else here..." They gape at them.

"Wait... are you a Cookie? No, wait, the chances of that are... calculating... impossible!" The child hurries over to them and begins pulling on their arms and legs, "But judging by your flat body and lack of ice cream in your ingredients, you must be a Cookie!"

"Can you not do that?" (C/F) Cookie asks, "It kind of hurts..."

"Oh, this is so exciting!" The little one ignores them, "I can finally run all these tests I've been wanting to try! How did you get past the Wafflebots? No, wait, how did you get here? Gosh, aside from Dark Enchantress Cookie I've never really spoken to another Cookie!"

"Dark Enchantress Cookie is here?" (C/F) Cookie asks.

"Uh, yeah. She's in the castle preparing for a new world!" They scoff, "I'm rather excited for it myself, and you must be pretty tough if you can beat the Wafflebots! I'm certain she'll let you stay! Oh, let's go examine your ingredients list!"

"Uh, actually–"

"Maybe you can just show me your strength right now actually!" They brought out a pair of massive strawberry arms that looked as though they were also made with something else. They continue ranting in words that don't make sense to (C/F) Cookie.

Irritated by the enthusiasm to beat the crap out of them, (C/F) Cookie takes a deep breath, hoping to silence the excited ranting. "STOOOOOOOOP!"

The child gapes at the two, now completely immobile, arms. "How...? OH! I see! You're the Cookie the failsafe is tied to! Fascinating! To think the first Cookie I'd run into after starting to work on them would be the one who could maybe help me improve them even more!"

"Why would I do that?"

"Hmm?"

"You seem perfectly aware that the bots are attacking the village below us... full of innocent Cookies who were barely struggling to survive to begin with. Why would I help you improve the bots when you're just using them for something that I feel is morally wrong?"

The child frowns angrily, "Because I said so!"

"Not how that works."

"Well, how would you stop me?"

"Punch the child."

"What? OW–HEY!" The small Cookie recoils as they're attacked by their own waffle arms. "That hurt."

"That was the point." (C/F) Cookie snickers, "But you did say some stuff about like...tests I think? I wouldn't be too opposed to you doing those... As long as you're not going to rip me apart."

"Well if you're suggesting it..."

"Do you want me to purposefully gather the entire city of Wafflebots to turn them against you?"

"Sounds like a tempting game... how about this, you race me to the castle entrance: I win, I get to do what I want, and you have to cooperate; you win, you get to tell me what I can and can't do. Deal?"

"... I'll give you a ten second head start." The speed demon starts counting down.

"Ha, what? You think I'm slow? How about I give you a head start?" They scoff.

"5, 4..." They continue.

"Oh, you're serious." The child takes off.

"1, I'm going." (C/F) Cookie shot off down the familiar roads, their feet knowing exactly where to go.
As they passed the child, they pat their head and yell, "Tag, you're it."

"Hey!"

Honestly the poor kid got what was coming for them.

"Oh, goodness, I was waiting for so long that I thought I may have to go back and look for you because you'd gotten lost..." They tease the kid from in front of the gates as their tiny legs sped them over.

"I'm not that slow!" They frown.

"In comparison to me? Yes, you are. But I won the race so—"

"That race was unfair!"

"What about it was unfair? I even gave you a ten second head start —which you laughed at—before absolutely crushing your pride. You're not upset that I won, you're upset that you humiliated yourself by being overconfident."

"..." The kid stops whatever they're doing and just stares at them.

"What?"

"Huh... 15% (C/F). No wonder you're so fast. Your legs are probably the only tough part of you!" [note that this paragraph doesn't make sense with all possible iterations of (C/F)]

"Is that an insult?"

"No." They frown, "But I am a bit disappointed. That's really the only unusual thing about you."

"Hey!"

"I mean, if I could get a hit on you, you'd probably instantly

crumble to bits!"

"That's an incredibly rude thing to say!"

"I'm not wrong though. What? Are you just a Cookie who tries to overlook the things you already know because you don't want to believe them, but when someone else points out the same thing you submit yourself to fact?"

They open their mouth to object, but that was almost spot on.

White Lily Cookie pointed out they're unhappiness here, which they had often thought about in their room; she also proved they Pure Vanilla Cookie was outright obsessive over them, which was... something they definitely noticed and didn't think much of; they knew he lied to them a lot and other Cookies even told them the truth about the thi bc s he lied to them about; after only Custard Cookie III knew what the Vanilla Kingdom was they had assumed something bad happened, but were only crushed with what this meant when the Pilgrims confirmed it; and Black Raisin Cookie had just helped them realize that Healer Cookie is indeed Pure Vanilla Cookie, and confirmed a suspicion they had had since they met him.

Letting others point out basic facts that they already knew to really have something done about this seems like their entire personality.

"Ha! See? You can't even prove me wrong!"

"Can you just stop making Wafflebots to attack innocent Cookies?" They frown.

"...Fine! You did win the race, even if you cheated."

"Not cheating."

"Whatever!"

"I'm going to go inside now." (C/F) Cookie rolls their eyes.

"Ugh, whatever. I'll go clean up my playground." The kid runs off.

"Never even got their name..." (C/F) Cookie shakes their head and sighs, entering the Castle.

[normally I'd post these when I finish the next two chapters. But chapter 10 is going to be stupidly long. Longer than any of the others are going to be. You'll find out why when I put it here. Now if you'll excuse me I'm going to go hand my remaining sanity to the few hours left before the next ancient is released.]

9: A Thousand Years of Darkness

Chaos was everywhere.
Scenes of the start of the war played over and over again, but there were also cakes bustling throughout the halls.

"Hello there, fine Cookie. I've been awaiting for your arrival. Please follow me. Do you have any accessories I may take from you?"

"...W-what? Huh? No!" They gape at the massive Cake Butler.

"Alright then, please follow me. Your presence is requested elsewhere."

A little voice in (C/F) Cookie's head tells them that is where they die as they follow the Cake through the chaotic, but still familiar, halls.

They are lead into the dining hall, where a massive feast is laid out, and a few unfamiliar cookies sit around the table.

"Ah, (C/F) Cookie, how wonderful of you to join us! Please, have a seat and help yourself." Dark Enchantress Cookie smiles.

They glance around the room, "What did you do to the dining hall?"

"Do you not like my redecorating?"

"... It's different..." They shrug. "I also noticed the hand aesthetic on some of the walls. Really screams 'I am in immense pain and my life is misery.'"

A few Cookies around the table have to hold in a laugh at their words.

"Oh, come now (C/F) Cookie." Dark Enchantress Cookie was clearly trying to maintain a powerful aura by not laughing at this. "This

feast is here for any Cookie strong enough to survive the new world."

"I literally did absolutely no fighting to get here."

"But you did pass all our defenses and cross the gates." She points out.

"Well, that's what happens when all the robots are programmed to listen to you." They shrug.

"While I find speaking to you amusing, there are important matters that must be discussed. Please, have a seat."

"..." They don't move, "You're going to use me as bait to get Pure Vanilla Cookie to come here, aren't you?"

"I wouldn't even have to try to do something like that (C/F) Cookie." She shakes her horned head, "After he founded this pathetic kingdom he placed a tracking spell on you. He always knows where you are."

"Oh. That's what she meant." Their eyes widen and they shudder at the memory of the Pomegranate Priestess telling them they had a strange magical aura.

"That is also why I placed a spell on your bedroom door so no one can open it but you."

"Y-you did?"

"You never noticed? How oblivious are you?" Dark Enchantress Cookie scoffs.

"..."

"Oh, right." She frowns.

"Stupidly oblivious." They shake their head, "But now that you say that it does make sense."

"I hope that at least would protect you from his hands, should he

arrive."

"Have... have you ever seen Pure Vanilla Cookie get angry? I-I don't know if you noticed when were redecorating, but over by the chapel—sort of where the greenhouse is—there's a slightly different colored wall..."

"And?"

"It had to be replaced..."

"Why?" One of the Cookies from around the table, one they recognized from the Hero's Gate asks.

"Licorice Cookie, do not interrupt master." A red Cookie beside him cuts in.

"Oh." The suspicious Cookie gasps and puts a hand over their mouth in realization.

"Pure Vanilla Cookie's anger makes him unstable. He cannot properly act when he is upset. How he behaved when you were apart from him during the Dark Flour War proved that." Dark Enchantress Cookie scoffs, "He is no threat to me."

(C/F) Cookie holds their tongue on their differing opinion.

"Why don't you join us (C/F) Cookie?" She grins, "I trust you know the secret of Cookie-kind. I promised to tell you what I discovered on my quest."

"Uh, yeah. Lily told me right before they came to shatter the moonstone. I'm doing my best not to think about anything that happened that day too hard. I'm already stressed out enough."

"Why is that? Isn't it good to know the truth about things (C/F) Cookie. With the way you spoke of our dear friend it's clear you're now aware of his secret. What right did he have to hide that from you? Tell me, (C/F) Cookie, when did he last care for your opinion? When did he last take your input into consideration? When were you actually happy by his side?"

"..." They frown, feeling ashamed at how they couldn't answer any of those questions. They feel tears building up.

"See? There is no point going back to a past that takes you for granted! Join my forces and I promise we'll ensure your happiness."

"WOULD YOU JUST SHUT UP?!" Their sadness finally gets the better of them, "YOU'VE NEVER CARED ABOUT ME OR WHAT I WANT! IF ANYTHING, I SHOULD BLAME ALL MY UNHAPPINESS ON YOU! YOU'RE THE ONE WHO PUSHED US TOGETHER TO SAVE YOURSELF! YOU ACTED LIKE YOU WERE GIVING ME A CHOICE, BUT REALLY YOU WERE JUST FUELING HIS OBSESSION AND FORCING ME TO HIM!
WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU ACTUALLY CARED ABOUT MY OPINION, HUH?! WHEN DID YOU ACTUALLY WANT TO KNOW WHAT I WANTED AND WEREN'T JUST PRETENDING TO TRY AND FIND A WAY TO APPEASE HIM BEFORE HE DID SOMETHING DRASTIC?!"

Dark Enchantress Cookie doesn't say anything, totally in shock.

"How dare you speak to Dark Enchantress Cookie in such a way!" The red Cookie says.

"You may know her as Dark Enchantress Cookie, but she's no different from that school-girl who killed the entire school in search of knowledge better left unknown!" They walked over to a specific window by the other side of the table and stepped up onto the sill. They kick the window open—it being the emergency escape—and jump out, sprinting back into the city and around to the gates a back way, never looking back. Having a spell placed on them by Pure Vanilla Cookie is enough for the portal to open for them, this time.
Pretty soon they get back to the village,overrun with Wafflebots.

"(C/F) Cookie!" Black Raisin Cookie gasps, "Why are you here?" She isn't in very good condition.

"I'm leaving." They say firmly, "I came this way to see if I needed to help in any way."

"No, we're ok. We were just going back up to help GingerBrave and the rest." She explains, "The portal has closed, so the crows will carry us up."

"Doing that will help you avoid any Wafflebots that child might have left too." They nod, "I didn't see them on my way back, but I took a different route."

"I've got a crow watching the group, so don't worry about us. We'll be ok." She nods.

"Thank you for that. Don't worry too much about me either." (C/F) Cookie smiles slightly, "I need to figure a few things out for myself, then maybe I'll come back."

"Goodbye (C/F) Cookie. I hope we do meet again." Black Raisin Cookie says, sharing a smile with them as well.

"Hopefully under better circumstances." They nod, waving goodbye, "But until then, farewell."

10: Timeless Kingdom

[I'm about to kiss my sanity goodbye with the sheer amount of in game text I'm gonna have to write. Also this chapter is longer than the others, almost double the normal length.]

Healer Cookie could feel their presence, but it wasn't as clear as it had been when they were standing right beside him. He missed the feeling of their hand in his, the lack of it was driving him insane and it had only been about an hour since they ran off!
It was definitely his fault that they did... but why?

"Healer Cookie, are you ok?" Strawberry Cookie asks him.

"Yes, I'm quite alright. I'm just worried about (C/F) Cookie." He smiles at her.

Poor girl had no idea that if (C/F) Cookie was still in the castle he'd rip apart every inch of it to find them. Not even the replaying events of the day it fell were enough to distract his mind from them.

"Uh, are you sure that's the only problem?" Chili Pepper Cookie adds.

"Yes."

The spicy Cookie pales at how direct and short his answer was. It was almost like someone else had answered for him.

"Come on! Maybe they're still here." GingerBrave says with total optimism.

"No, I imagine they left some time ago." Healer Cookie frowns.

"Why do you say that?" Wizard Cookie asks.

"They didn't seem too happy about being here."

"They didn't?" Custard Cookie III says, "But this Kingdom is their home!"

"..." Healer Cookie doesn't reply.

The cakes around end the conversation by attacking the group.

Healer Cookie had other things on his mind though as he followed with the group, assisting where Custard Cookie III could not.

They seemed unnerved by him when he last saw them... did they not recognize him?

It had taken him a moment to recognize their presence when he felt them so close by down in the village. He had thought it was impossible until he saw them and the child healer.

But even then, they seemed far more suspicious of his intention, which was unlike them.
Had he finally made a mistake and hurt them? Should he have just kept them with him and sealed them in the castle with himself?

"Phew, these sponge brains are everywhere!" Wizard Cookie breathes a sigh of relief, "That last bout was close... I almost lost my hat!"

"... Hmm." The cake butler, Esterházy, examines the group closely.

"Oh! Stop staring at us!" Chili Pepper Cookie yells, "Hey, wait a second... you look like that Choco Werehound Brute!"

"I have been awaiting your arrival, Cookies." Esterházy says, "Please follow me. Your presence is requested elsewhere."

"What are you up to?!" GingerBrave asks, suspicious of the cake.

"One of great power awaits you. If you would, please... this way."

He leads them to the dining hall as well, in all its redecorated glory... where Dark Enchantress Cookie sat with her followers around the table.

"Look at all this FOOD!" Custard Cookie III exclaims, "Roasted Jellies, Jelly Burgers, Jelly Pizza! They EVEN have Jelly Steak! This is a feast fit for a king! And rightly so, as their king has returned, he he!"

Healer Cookie didn't trust the food, but he also didn't want to draw attention to himself at that moment. Now was not the time to reveal himself, and he was very glad he hadn't done so sooner. If he had, they may have expected him to defeat Dark Enchantress Cookie then and there!

"Welcome, GingerBrave and friends." Dark Enchantress Cookie greets.

"Dark Enchantress Cookie!" The addressed Cookie gasps, then huffs, "We're not gonna be swayed by some food!"
Custard Cookie III was already sitting down though, so his words didn't matter much.

"C'mon! Let's take our seats!" The child grins, "The Jellies are getting cold!"

Healer Cookie took note that there was space for six more to sit, but one was not set, almost like it had recently been cleared. He also knew that was where (C/F) Cookie liked to sit on this table.

But he held his tongue. It was not time to intervene. Not yet...

"Hey! Aren't you a little TOO excited?!" Chili Pepper Cookie gapes at Custard Cookie III's actions.

"May I help you with your belongings?" Esterházy asks.

"A grand idea!" Custard Cookie III starts handing his things to the Werebrute. "Here, hold my crown and scepter. Try not to get them wrinkled."

"Very well, sir." Esterházy nods, "As for everyone else... If you would please take your seats?"

"Hurry up and sit down!" A robed Cookie, that Healer Cookie had never met before, hisses angrily, "Do not keep Dark Enchantress

Cookie waiting!"

"As I promised... I have been waiting at the top of the world." She begins grandly, "You are the first Cookies to cross the gates— the first to be PERSONALLY welcomed into my fold."

But what about (C/F) Cookie? Where were they? Had he been wrong, and they just hadn't come here?"

"Come... Take a seat. Let us have a heart-to-heart discussion." She continues.

"Oh! So, like, can we ask you anything?" Custard Cookie III says with continual enthusiasm. "Cause, I've been dying to know! How did you train the Cake Monsters? I want one as well!"

"I merely look upon them."

"Oooh! So it's an eye-contact thing!"

"But before we progress any further..." She says, "I have a question for our "esteemed" guests."

That was a suspicious shift in the conversation.

"Do you know the reason why we, Cookies, were created?"

An equally suspicious question...
What on Earthbread did she mean? Was this the same thing she was trying to say during the Dark Flour War?

"Nope!" Custard Cookie III smiles.

"Me neither! But I know I was baked with a particular set of skills! Heh!" Chili Pepper Cookie boasts.

"How predictable. Pathetic." Dark Enchantress Cookie scoffs angrily, "And you call yourselves COOKIES! What an absolute waste of perfectly fine dough!" She gets up from her chair.
"I'm wasting my breath with this conversation. Your crumbs will litter this table!"

Now, it was time.

Healer Cookie speaker up, "... STOP! I can no longer stand by and watch you bring destruction!"

"HA! And who might you be?"

His disguise had worked that well?

"What is it that YOU can do to stop ME? You're a dusty, ragged, unnamed nobody!"

"Yes, I have been hiding for far too long... But the time has come to step out from the shadows." He reaches up, pulling the bandages off his face. "I will ensure your schemes are put to an end!"

"YOU...!" Dark Enchantress Cookie cries, then mutters something he can't hear over everyone else's amazement.

"PURE VANILLA COOKIE?!" Wizard Cookie gasps.

"HOLD MY CANE!" GingerBrave gasps, "Healer Cookie is Pure Vanilla Cookie?!"

"Ah... It seems an uninvited guest was among us." Dark Enchantress Cookie frowns. "Tell me, are you finally realizing just how pathetic you are and have come to hand over your soul jam, or are you just here looking for your "beloved" (C/F) Cookie?"

"WHAT?!" Custard Cookie III gasps.

"... I'm here to confront you. I should've stepped in to stop you long before now. But we started this war. It only makes sense that we are the ones who end it." He says sternly.

Dark Enchantress Cookie laughs, "You have nothing but senseless courage! How amusing. To think that there was ever a time when I thought you were threatening! Tell me then..." She mocks, "How do you plan to stop ME? Did you think your ragged attire and worn expression would win my sympathy?"

He tightens his grip on his staff. He didn't realize how tight, until he

heard it cry out in pain.

Dark Enchantress Cookie scoffs, "What a waste of a good banquet... Enough of this!" She stands up to leave, her followers joining her.

"How dare you ruin my Master's plan!" A Cookie he doesn't know says, "Fate will not be on your side tonight!"

The adventurers (and Pure Vanilla Cookie) are forced to flee the dining hall and into the kitchens, battling cake monsters inside. After getting back to the main halls of the castle, they stop.

"Healer Cookie!" GingerBrave starts, "Wait, er... should we call you Pure Vanilla Cookie now?"

"I can't believe you've been hiding your identity all this time!" Chili Pepper Cookie folds her arms in annoyance, "You're just as bad as (C/F) Cookie!"

"My apologies." He smiles at them all, lying straight to their faces, "It was not my intent to conceal my identity." He absolutely was trying to hide who he was to avoid the awestruck stares he was now receiving.
[There is no way he was not trying to hide who he was. You cannot change my mind.]

"I'm, if you don't mind me asking... What exactly happened?" Wizard Cookie asks.

"When Dark Enchantress Cookie was released from her confinement, I, too, awoke from a deep slumber." He explains. "And then memories came flooding back." He pauses for a moment, "But after our fateful meeting I remembered something else: With my friends I could overcome any impossible difficulty.
Which is why I refuse to give up! I will stand against Dark Enchantress Cookie, and I will not back down!"

"That's the spirit!" GingerBrave agrees, "Let's bring down Dark Enchantress Cookie and save the Vanilla Kingdom together!"

"Hey, uh, I do want to ask..." Strawberry Cookie cuts in, "Does anyone know where (C/F) Cookie is? It doesn't seem like they're

here."

"Honestly, I've been worried about them." Pure Vanilla Cookie frowns, "They're not very strong and often hurt themselves on even the smallest things."

"Really?" Custard Cookie III gasps, "They didn't get hurt at all when they were with us..."

"I'm glad to hear that." He smiles gently. "They are very dear to me."

Understatement of the century.

"They didn't want to talk very much about their relationship with you..." Strawberry Cookie informs him, "We didn't even know they knew you until we got to the Academy."

"... You visited the Academy?" He frowns thoughtfully.
Dark Enchantress Cookie obviously knew something he didn't and there hadn't been time to demand it of her.

"—and that was how we freed Dark Enchantress Cookie!" Custard Cookie III finishes.

"I see..." Pure Vanilla Cookie nods. "Well we should probably get moving. We wouldn't want to be swarmed by cake monsters."

He began to lead the way, but then let the rest take the lead.
He mostly watched them fight, healing whatever injuries they asked him to afterwards.

Soon they reached the Solarium of Unity.

"Wow..." Strawberry Cookie marvels, "It's beautiful...!"

"Five ancient heroes, depicted on the glass itself!" GingerBrave says like he's never seen a stain-glass window before, "And look! Pure Vanilla Cookie, that's you right?"

"When the Vanilla Kingdom was first established, my friends and I swore an oath right here in the Solarium of Unity..." Pure Vanilla Cookie smiles fondly at the memory, "Our soft and crispy hearts

beating as one... In pursuit of happiness for All Cookies."

"Do you know where the others are?" GingerBrave asks him.

"I... do not know what has transpired to them after the Dark Flour War..." He frowns in annoyance, "This is all due to my failures. I could only protect (C/F) Cookie by acting before this all happened... If I hadn't acted then, would I have lost them too?"

"Wait, that's why they were out in the woods by themself?" Custard Cookie III gasps.

"Indeed."

"But why didn't you just have them stay in the castle? Why did you go to such an extreme measure?"

"Did they not tell you?" Pure Vanilla Cookie chuckles, "(C/F) Cookie is my lover!"

"WHAT?!" Shouts everyone else.

"Oh, they didn't..." He frowns.

"That's... that explains a lot." Wizard Cookie says thoughtfully.

"Yeah, it does." Chili Pepper Cookie agrees. "That answers most of the questions we had about them anyway."

"What?"

"Almost being why they wouldn't just tell us that in the first place!" Custard Cookie III crosses his arms angrily.

"And why they didn't suggest coming back here..." Wizard Cookie adds.

Pure Vanilla Cookie frowns.
Had he upset them by sealing them away?
It worked—it had kept them safe—so why would they want to go somewhere else?

He can always ask them later, once he's certain Dark Enchantress Cookie has left the Kingdom entirely.

"It's still too early to start worrying!" GingerBrave insists, "They're great heroes, so I'm sure they're around somewhere!"

"Your words bring courage to my heart." He smiles softly, "I look forward to meeting my friends again. I pray they are all safe, as healthy and bright as their likenesses seen here."
He looks up at the windows.

They never did get around to making one for (C/F) Cookie... even though they all agreed that it was something they should do for them as a surprise. ...Also to help them feel more like part of the group.

The Cookies continue down the hall, battling the cakes they encountered.

Many warped visions of the past (Chili Pepper Cookie made a particularly accurate comment about how time was just an absolute mess in the Castle) did nothing to help Pure Vanilla Cookie stay grounded in the present. All these Cookies that counted on him... How many of them made it to safety?

He purposefully ignored the cake monsters painting big red Xs over statues of him—specifically the stone likeness of his face. Were there always this many of those in the halls?

The group turns a corner and reaches the chapel.

"Say..." Custard Cookie III stares at the room, "This wall is a slightly different color than the other ones..."

"No it's... Hey! It is!" Chili Pepper Cookie laughs. "Is that a stylistic choice or something?"

"What do you mean? It looks perfectly normal to me." Pure Vanilla Cookie examines the wall as well, "It's always looked like this."

"No, they're right, it is a different color." Wizard Cookie nods. "Also looks like the floor over here is a bit damaged..."

"Hey, you're right." GingerBrave repeatedly feels the difference between two places on the floor with his cane and feet. "Like there was some sort of explosion."

"I don't want to interrupt, but look!" Strawberry Cookie points to the end of the Chapel.

"Hey! Isn't that Pure Vanilla Cookie?" GingerBrave gasps at the scene.

The Cookie in question smiles warmly at it, "Ah, the chapel. Many a day I spent here, praying in these quiet halls. And this scene before us is..."
He wasn't really watching his coronation, but his dear, (C/F) Cookie, smiling in the front pew.

He hadn't been able to see it before, but it was obvious that they were just waiting to jump up from their seat and fling their arms around him, which they did the second his oath was finished.

Wizard Cookie starts to say something, but is cut off by the memory continuing past where he expected.

"My king!" They jokingly say.

"Dear," his past self chuckles, "we already talked about how you have no need for such formalities."

"I can say I'm the first Cookie to address you as such now though." They grin.

White Lily Cookie snickers and he laughs and returns their hug.

"I am grateful that you've stuck by me all this time..." He starts, "But I never expected you to leap at the opportunity to hold me like this with everyone watching."

They tense up, "I change my mind; let me go."

"It's too late for that now, dear!"

(C/F) Cookie sputters in embarrassment.

"Aww, the two of you are so cute together!" Strawberry Cookie smiles.

"Now I get why they were too embarrassed to talk about this!" Chili Pepper Cookie laughs.

Pure Vanilla Cookie laughs as well, "That does sound like them."

"Here I was worried that this would be a painful memory for you to relive." Wizard Cookie grins.

"No, moments like these are exactly why I've made the decision to save this kingdom, our home." Pure Vanilla Cookie shakes his head.

"I like the way you're thinking, Pure Vanilla Cookie!" GingerBrave says, "Let's get going and find a way to defeat Dark Enchantress Cookie!"

They continue down the hall, but Pure Vanilla Cookie looks back, half-hoping that (C/F) Cookie would run up and hug him again, despite knowing that they weren't nearby at all.

Wait... when did the cakes defiling the statues of him start removing the heads?

He didn't care much for when the adventurers fought the giant hound Cakeberus.

"I wonder what Black Raisin Cookie is doing..." Strawberry Cookie says thoughtfully, "She looked... sad when she left..."

"Perhaps... she is feeling resentment towards me." Pure Vanilla Cookie frowns, "But if I had not remained here, Dark Enchantress Cookie would have wrought havoc on the village in her attempt to steal my Soul Jam."

"I wouldn't worry about Black Raisin Cookie!" Custard Cookie III tries to lighten the mood, "I'm sure she'll understand!"

"Let's get her a gift after we beat Dark Enchantress Cookie!" GingerBrave suggests.

"A splendid idea!" That actually coincided with what Pure Vanilla Cookie's plans are after he reclaims the throne. "The villagers have long been without proper meals. We should bring them a feast of Jellies! It will make them so happy!"

They keep going down the hallway and quickly reach the White Lily Greenhouse.
Unlike everywhere else, here looked completely untouched...
Maybe his friend is still in there...

"A greenhouse with... Oh, so many lilies!" Strawberry Cookie admires the flowers.

"Wait... Lilies?" Wizard Cookie looks around.

"White Lily Cookie?!" Pure Vanilla Cookie gapes at the friend that had just partially taken his mind off worrying about (C/F) Cookie.

Then she turns around and it's just Dark Enchantress Cookie.

How upsetting.

"Still distracted by these hopeless echoes?" She taunts him, "Gaze upon me and prepare for oblivion's embrace! ... For I am DARK ENCHANTRESS COOKIE!"

His eyes narrow. She seems more willing to taunt him than he would've normally expected... with all the nostalgic things this garden reminded him of— then it clicks.
"They know." He's never been so angry with anyone, "You told them, didn't you?"

Everyone, even Dark Enchantress Cookie, fails to understand his words.

"What did you do to them?" He continues. His voice is calm, but his rage is beyond description.

"Oh, I assure you that I haven't done anything to your "beloved". Whatever they know, they have learned for themself." She laughs, finally understanding his words. "They ran off on their own accord."

"You expect me to believe such lies?" He replies coldly.

"I'm not lying."

"I do not believe that."

"Ugh, I don't have time to argue with petty hypocrites!" Dark Enchantress Cookie shakes her head and disappears.

Even as the rest make their way back through the greenhouse to the main halls of the castle, Pure Vanilla Cookie stands there, tightly gripping his staff in anger. He takes a deep breath to try and calm it, with absolutely no results.
His staff is afraid of this newfound level of rage. Afraid he'd break it in half with just how tight his hold is.

He follows the group back to the hall.
"It seems that you have been dragged into this quarrel between us. I am very sorry."

"Don't worry about it!" GingerBrave smiles, "After all, Cookies should help each other! But what was that about?"

"Oh, just a private matter between the two of us." He smiles. "It's not that important."

Never had such an enormous lie been told in the history of lies. Nothing will ever compare to the sheer lack of truth that was in that statement. Well, of course there are bigger lies, but they're obvious and usually immediately called out, or the listeners may just assume the liar is stupid.

They keep going down the hall. He hadn't realized just how close they were to his chambers until they were right inside them.

"These used to be my chambers..." He thoughtfully looks around the eloquent room.

"Oh wow! So this is where kings live?!" Custard Cookie III looks around and sighs, "And here I am, still living in a small hut." The child grins, "But that's OK! I will request my hardworking subjects to build me a better house!"

"Hey! This isn't the time for a tour!" Chili Pepper Cookie yells, "If you don't keep up, we're going to leave you!"

"Nooo! Wait for me!" Custard Cookie III runs after her.

But Pure Vanilla Cookie intentionally stayed behind to look around a bit more. "This place is very well-preserved..." He sits on the edge of the bed, "To think that I once used this bed, soft like a giant marshmallow... It all feels like a distant dream."

What he was really thinking of was all the time he and (C/F) Cookie had spent lying on it together, talking about nothing in particular. They were always rather restless, so when he found them wandering around at night he would bring them here to help them sleep—though he would often fall asleep before them.

"Ohh... Heeey... Hiii... Whatcha doooin...?"

He didn't know these Cookies, but his anger from earlier was gone, so he was in a particularly good mood. "Oh, I'm taking a look around... For old times' sake."

"Oh... Cool..." This odd purple Cookie says, "Is it making you think happy memories?"

An... oddly worded question... Perhaps this Cookie isn't very intelligent."

"Yes. These walls have seen much over the years. Many of those moments were quite delightful."

Get your minds out of the gutter. Cookies don't reproduce that way.

"Ooooh, far out..." The Cookie seems absentminded, "What about memories like... this...?" They threw spores at him.

Pure Vanilla Cookie coughs, "What... What is happening?"

"There, there... It's alright... Shroomy Spores won't hurt you."—Please do not eat random mushrooms, it is possible that they can kill you—"They're gonna help you... Yeah..."

That doesn't sound reassuring...

"Help you see more things! Bad things! That's right..."

Even less reassuring.

"Wait..." He coughs, "My... eyes...!"

"Open your eyes... Can you see? Can you?" The Cookie asks.

"This... what is this..."
Before him was a vision of the four others, entangled in he didn't know what, and trapped in the dark he didn't know where.
There was no way this was ever a real thing he saw.
"What... What's going on?! Hollyberry Cookie?! Everyone...? Have you- no..." He stops himself from continuing.

"On the day of the Dark Flour War, you meddled with forbidden Cresent Moon magic to stand against Dark Enchantress Cookie." A different Cookie says, "You foolish wielding of that magic has cursed them."

Then... wouldn't (C/F) Cookie be cursed too? Not like that was the only time he's used that.
That is yet another reason why this vision is obviously constructed to deceive him.
Unlike Dark Enchantress Cookie, these Cookies obviously don't know his weaknesses.

Though, the old chapel wall would argue that it's not a weakness.

"Lies! There is not an ounce of truth in these visions!" He yells. "You cannot deceive me with your petty tricks!"

"You have run from your past for long enough. Open your eyes and face the truth..."
Is that... Dark Cacao Cookie's son? "Gaze upon the world you actions have wrought."

What happened to that poor child?

Has he really been so distracted by his dear that he's been hurting

others, just like he's been afraid to this whole time? Has he hurt his dear, and that's why they left?

"H-h-h-how... WHAT HAVE I DONE?!" He cries, but not in fear or disgust with his actions, but with anger towards himself.

"HA! Now you reveal your treacherous colors... But perhaps you may still prove useful. You will collect the Soul Jam shards scattered across Earthbread for us."

He wasn't even worthy of his own! How-

"Pure Vanilla Cookie!"

The Light of Truth calls to him, silencing all his thoughts.

"W-What?" He looks around the familiar place it had brought him.

"Pure Vanilla Cookie, you must clear your mind. Your anger is hindering your ability to see me. You must focus on your goal to be able to achieve it."

"But... I've already failed..." He tears up, "I hurt the Cookies I care about, the Cookie I love."

"That does not mean you cannot make amends."

"I...I hadn't thought about that." He admits, "But how are they supposed to forgive me, if I can't even forgive myself?"

"That is for you to figure out yourself. The time for your second chance has come, but it's your decision what you will do with it."

He doesn't say anything. He can hear voices beyond his glass prison. Sounds of fighting...

"You FOOLISH crumb-for-brain PESTS!" Dark Enchantress Cookie yells, "CRUMBLE! ALL OF YOU!"

"NO!" He yells on instinct, "STOP!"

The jar shatters and the adrenaline allows him to make the

strongest protection spell he's probably ever made.

Dark Enchantress Cookie is especially shocked by his escape. No one else saw it coming, but she was the only one who saw with full view what happened.

"What? Huh? Wow, we're all still in one piece!" GingerBrave marvels.

"Is everyone alright?"

"Pure Vanilla Cookie!" Strawberry Cookie smiles, "You protected us!"

"Thank goodness..." he sighs, "I was able to protect everyone... this time..."

"No..." Dark Enchantress Cookie cries, "This... cannot be. My intricately crafted plan has gone to crumbs... Was it... meant to end this way...?"

Her assistant comes to her side, "Dark Enchantress Cookie... Though unfortunate... I shall guide you to safety..."

The Cookies of Darkness hurry out of the castle, but before anything can be said among the remaining six, Black Raisin Cookie and the Cookies from the village run inside.

"Are we too late?! OH! Pure Vanilla Cookie! You're alright!" Black Raisin Cookie says.

"Black Raisin Cookie..." He starts shamefully, "You have come to the aid of the Cookie who has betrayed your village."

"Well, I can't say I wasn't angry before...!" She blushes with embarrassment, "But I too would have had no choice but to leave. Congratulations, Pure Vanilla Cookie! The Vanilla Kingdom can now start rebuilding! Should I be calling you "king" now?"

"King..." He says thoughtfully.
He has made his decision, he just hopes the others will understand. He takes his hat off, "I have, in fact, been pondering about

abdicating the throne."

"WHAAAT?!" Custard Cookie III yells, "How can you say that?!"

"I wish to make this place a kingdom belonging to all Cookies. A home for all, with no king or any subjects. A home for the Cookies of the desolate village... A haven for Cookies who have escaped the oven. The true kingdom of all!" He explains, "Flavors, textures, none will matter. All will be welcome to live in happiness... Spending time at your village has opened my eyes."

"A noble cause!" Black Raisin Cookie says, astounded by his words, "That's why I love our village. We may be poor and hungry, but we always have each other's backs." She smiles, "And actually... living here doesn't seem too bad either! The villagers may finally get a chance to pursue their dreams."

She asks the villagers and many start suggesting ways they can help, but something keeps nagging at Pure Vanilla Cookie.

"Excuse me... Pure Vanilla Cookie?" Wizard Cookie cuts in, "Are you sure about all this? The kingdom has just been returned to you..."

"I have finally dawned upon the truth." Pure Vanilla Cookie answers, "We are all kings and heroes. Isn't that what your kingdom looks like as well?"

"He's right! Our kingdom doesn't have a king, but everyone worked hard to build it from nothing!" GingerBrave agrees. "And that is the way! The way of us, Cookies!"

"Then... what's your next move?" Wizard Cookie asks him.

"I... need to speak with (C/F) Cookie." He frowns, "The two of us have a few things we need to talk about." He takes a deep breath and smiles faintly, "After that, I've still a task at hand. I must find my friends."

"The Ancient Heroes!" GingerBrave gasps.

"Yes. My closest friends..." He nods, "We've been through thick and thin, and I... miss them greatly. I do have a request to make... can

you find out what drove Dark Enchantress Cookie down this path?"

"Sure thing! Leave it to us!" GingerBrave nods, "We'll find out why Dark Enchantress Cookie is doing this! And on our way, we'll make sure that all Cookies are safe and happy!"

"Thank you... All of you." Pure Vanilla Cookie smiles, "I will cherish the memories we have made together on our journey. May you remain crispy and fresh in your journeys..."

He waves the travelers farewell as they make their way back through the castle.

"Uh, Pure Vanilla Cookie..." Black Raisin Cookie says, "(C/F) Cookie said they were leaving..."

"They aren't too far... it seems that they've stayed put for some time." He shrugs, "I... do want to speak with them privately." He grins, "If that's alright... I will only be gone a short while."

"Alright." Black Raisin Cookie nods, "But maybe tell us how we can start rebuilding before you leave."

11: Shattered Chain

(C/F) Cookie stares down at their reflection in the lake.
They weren't certain how long they'd been sitting there, but they definitely felt better than they did earlier. The whirring of the Wafflebots they had conscripted to their armada of protection no longer felt loud or overpowering the sounds of the dead forest.

Everything felt so much less meaningful now...
Before they wouldn't have gone this far with their running, but now, they had no desire to look back. Sure, that would mean never seeing Black Raisin Cookie and the villagers again, but they didn't know the villagers... that wouldn't be a huge loss to their social life.

If only they could remember how to get to the Hollyberry Kingdom from here...

"Dear..."

Oh no...
Oh crumbs!
Why did his feet have to be so quiet?!

"Wait!" He says hurriedly, seeing them move to leave, "I just want to talk!"

"About what? What is there to talk about?!" They turn to look at Pure Vanilla Cookie. "You imprisoned me in a powerful seal and left me there! You threatened, I don't even want to know how many, Cookies over me! You've lied to me about so many things! Before we were even together you were planning on kidnapping me! Is there anything else I should know about?!"

"..."

"Yeah... see? There isn't much to talk about." They scoff.

"(C/F) Cookie..." He starts.

"I already said, there is nothing to talk about! Leave me alone!"

"NO!" He yells.

This caught both of them off guard because he shoves his hands over his mouth and they nearly fall in the water.

"I... I'm sorry." He continues like that hadn't just happened, "You have every right to be angry with me... I just... I-I don't know what to do with all my feelings."

"Maybe try not threatening others and being honest with me?" They roll their eyes.

"I did." He nods, "After White Lily Cookie destroyed the Academy, I had all the horrible things I wanted to do put into perspective... I perfected my magic to heal others to stop violent spells from being my go to. I instead have to be intentionally thinking to cast them. I... I tried to be more open with you, but I was afraid that I'd hurt you in some way if I was."

"And just look how that turned out." They grumble.

"E-eventually I just didn't know what to do with myself. Rather than continually thinking of hurting others, I had those... outbursts. I know those scared you, so I tried to distract myself to prevent any situation where they would happen." He continues. "But that made you feel unappreciated. There was just no way for me to balance my job as king and my time with you..."

"...And?"

"(C/F) Cookie, I gave up the throne. I'd rather spend time with you than stress all the time over small, unimportant things." Pure Vanilla Cookie informs them.

"... Look." They sigh, "I appreciate that you're trying to fix this, but I do need a bit more time by myself."

"That's alright dear. Why don't we go home and-."

"Pure Vanilla Cookie!" They angrily cut in, "I'm not going back right

now!"

Silence.
Not a good silence either. A silence that told them he was gauging how angry to be about that.

"I know you're trying... but I still need to think about a few things." They continue, hoping that their explanation would lessen his rage. "Things I want to think about out here."

"Dear I-"

"You're not going to be able to sweet talk me into changing my mind." They frown.

He goes quiet again.
Not good...

"I..." He takes a deep breath, "I don't know what I'll do without you. I... do understand your decision, but at the same time I don't want to be without you..."

"So what? You'll force me to go back with you?" They snap back.

"...I don't want to seem like I'm ignoring your decision."

Oh.
Oh no!
With an answer like that it's obvious that he's going to drag them back, willing or not.

"Pure Vanilla Cookie..." They stand up, "Don't."

"I... I am sorry I..." He seems upset about his decision.

They see his staff's eye widen, almost as if part of himself was telling them to get out of there, and take it as their cue to leave.

"Get him!" They command the bots, then turn and start running carefully around the lake.

"NO!!"

A familiar spell catches them around the leg and pulls them back before they feel it released.

They black out as they hit the water.

The Wafflebots had been shattered to pieces by Pure Vanilla Cookie's rage, and he hurried to the side of the lake quickly get them out before they got too soggy.

"No no no!" He mutters.

"Pure Vanilla Cookie!" Black Raisin Cookie hurries up from behind him. "Is everything alright? We heard shouting."

"Yes." He scares himself with how calm he sounds, "I just got startled by the Wafflebots still left in the forest. I'll be heading back to the Kingdom in just a moment."

She hadn't seen what happened... even with her sharpened eye and crows.

Good.

"Alright."
He hears her crow take flight and then hurries to lift (C/F) Cookie out of the water.

This was going to work out in his favor, wasn't it?

[from here on out the story feels rather slow... I've been debating on what exactly to do from here; I think I know what direction to head now, so here's this. (Yes, that means the ending is {somewhat} planned out.)]

12: Eternal Prison

(C/F) Cookie snaps awake in a dark room. They had never been to the castle dungeon, but this was definitely it.

"Oh thank goodness, you're alright!"

"What is wrong with you?" They yell at Pure Vanilla Cookie.

"..." He doesn't answer that, but his expression suddenly looks a lot more stern, "Careful dear, I'm not too happy with you right now."

"No. No! You don't just get to pretend that you're in the right of this situation! You nearly broke me into too many pieces!"

"Oh (C/F) Cookie." He laughs, "Don't you remember when you fell in the river in Hollyberry Cookie's Kingdom? I proved I could help you when you were soggy then, why would now have been much different?"

"I wasn't unconscious then!"

"I remember you saying you wish you were."

"THAT'S NOT THE POINT!" They snap back, also remembering saying that.

"You're right. It's not." He grins, "I've given up the throne. We have all the time in Earthbread to catch up now!"

"There isn't much to say that I haven't already said!" They grumble, "Especially how locking me in this cage is wrong."

"Oh no dear, the locks were all broken when the cake monsters fled the Kingdom! You're just not strong enough to lift the door open." He chuckles.

"Well, now I feel insulted." They say sadly. That particular comment brought into perspective just how helpless they actually are.

Freedom within reach, but they wouldn't be able to get it if they tried.

"You're also still not at full strength from getting soggy." He adds, much less happily. "I wouldn't recommend standing up until a while later, so your legs don't break off."

"You didn't completely dry me?" They gasp.

"No." He confesses, "If I did you wouldn't have taken time to listen."

"Hmm... maybe that's because you've imprisoned me for no reason." They suggest sarcastically. "I am upset about that, yeah."

"..." He opens his eyes to give them a more sincere look, "I love you. I just... don't want to lose you..."

"I think I can list about five things you've done in the past... however long since I saw you again, that have made me upset." They now realize that they have no idea how long they've been unconscious.

"When I first woke up after the seal was broken, the first thing I felt was your presence. I didn't remember what that meant, but it brought me a sense of comfort to know you were ok." He smiles sadly, "Then, when I remembered why that was there in the first place, I was confused how your seal had opened. I never suspected that a child would've been able to open something so powerful."

"... He's Premier Custard Cream Cookie's descendant, right?"

"Wouldn't surprise me..." Pure Vanilla Cookie frowns, "I placed him in charge when..."

"When we left before the war." They finish for him, "Yeah, I remember that."

"That was right before the war dear." He shakes his head, "When I returned, Dark Enchantress Cookie had already attacked."

That timing is either fantastic, or terrible. He wasn't living for months to years without them before he sealed himself away as

well... but that also means that he wasn't there at the very start to put a stop to it because of them.

"...Why did you do that anyway?"

"Hmm? I thought I told you: I didn't want to lose you because of an attack I feared was coming. It's just unfortunate that it was sooner than I anticipated." He answers.

They sigh, "I could have been stuck there forever..."

"But you weren't!" He says hurriedly, more like he's trying to reassure his justification to himself than them, "You're here, you're ok, and I promise I won't ever do that to you again."

"Then are you just going to keep me down here forever?"

"O-Of course not!"

"Then when will you let me go?" They ask.

Silence.

"Pure Vanilla Cookie!" They say with newfound anger.

He frowns, fiddling with his staff, obviously avoiding answering.

"Vanilla!"

"I don't know... I don't want you hurting yourself."

"Oh! And locking me up against my will definitely isn't hurting me!"

"Dear, are you doubting my ability to care for you?"

"Are you assuming how much I wish to be cared for? I'm not a child, Pure Vanilla Cookie..." They reply angrily.

The silence of avoidance. This obviously wasn't a very thoroughly thought through long-term plan...
Clearly he'd have to let them go at some point (whether that be because someone else discovered them here, or because he could not continue to keep them here)!

Muffled yells come from a room attached to the dungeon.

(C/F) Cookie opens their mouth to yell for help, but chokes as they feel a familiar spell(levitation spell) grip their throat.

"Dear (C/F) Cookie..." Pure Vanilla Cookie smiles, "Do remember that while I am a healer, I don't just know healing and defense spells."
The only reason he wasn't moving them was definitely his care for the fact that their legs could crumble off if they were jolted around too much at the moment.
"I won't restrain you further if I don't have to." He says coldly, "Don't push me to do something the both of us would regret."

He lets go, and they gasp and cough for air.

"Now, clearly Cookies are requesting me elsewhere." He says like he didn't just do that, "I'll be back later. Until then, dear."

They are left with the realization of just how powerless they were to him, and the silence of their own fear.

13: A Child... No!

Strawberry Crepe Cookie did not like what the Cookies were doing to the only home they'd ever known.
They were still upset with the one with the crows for cheating the rigged coin toss, and were holding a petty grudge against the former king for foiling Dark Enchantress Cookie and leaving them with all these boring Cookies.
They spent most of their time sulking and feeling sorry for themself in the Hangar, which they had been given to appease their temper tantrum.

This just wasn't fair! What was wrong with them using the Wafflebots in any way they wanted? What was wrong with making Cookies stronger with built on upgrades?

"Hello child." The former king grins at them, "What are you up to?"

Strawberry Crepe Cookie huffs in anger, not responding to the smiling king.

The way this Cookie reached out to others always felt empty, like all the care he held was fake—not that this was true, it was just the child's bias.
Pure Vanilla Cookie actually does care about the ideas and doings of the Cookies around him, he just cares a whole lot more about (C/F) Cookie.

He stares at the small, angry Cookie, suddenly a whole lot less cheerful, "Are you angry with someone again? Do you want to talk about it?"

"Ugh! Just leave me alone!" The small Cookie ran off down the repaired streets, through the renovated buildings, and into the now publicly owned castle. Sure, the (former) king still lives here, but now anyone can walk in whenever they like. It's just that purposefully breaking windows and such is still a crime.

Strawberry Crepe Cookie runs through the empty halls and eventually plops down in the library full of shelves after shelves of various books on magic, sometimes even books in cauldrons or other nooks and crannies since there were just... so many books. Like who has the time to read this many books?

"Boring!" Strawberry Crepe Cookie slams shut the book they randomly opened, not understanding half the words on the page. They needed something exciting to cure their boredom, and they didn't want to get in trouble with that crow Cookie since she'd break all their bots again, then they'd get angry, and Pure Vanilla Cookie would have to break them up before another fight starts.

Hang on, that door broke after those Cookies rammed straight through it on their way to fight Dark Enchantress Cookie, and no one really needed to use the dungeons... Why did it get fixed?

"Hmm..." They hop down from the shelves they were looking through and walk over to the door.

A sign on the handle read, "I cleaned this out, no need to come in here. I put the door back because it makes this room feel nicer."

Suspicious... Can half the Cookies here even read?

Strawberry Crepe Cookie opens the door and steps inside the dungeon. An eerie silence lingers in the air, creating an ominous atmosphere.

"Oh! Now this is interesting!" They say excitedly. They wander through the halls, looking in the cells, until they come to one that wasn't empty.

"YOU!" They yell at the Cookie they recognize from the race the two had.

"CHILD!" The other points at them, not standing up from where they were sitting.

"What are you doing in here?"

"Kid, listen, you need to get out of here."

"What are you doing in here?" They repeat.

"I don't know what he'll do if he finds out you're here..."

"Answer the question! What are you doing in here?"

"I got kidnapped, OK?!" The speedy Cookie raises their arms in exasperation. "I can't stand up because it's too damp for my legs to dry! I couldn't even open the cage if I wanted to!"

"Is it locked?" Strawberry Crepe Cookie examines the bars.

"...No."

"I could open it!" They summon their massive robotic arms.

"No! No! Put those away! He'd be more furious if you took me."

"...He... Pure Vanilla Cookie?"

"Uh, maybe."

"So that's what the sign is for!"

"What?"

"He put a sign on the door here from the library saying there's no point in coming in here since it's empty." They laugh, "What a lie!"

"Listen kid, I don't know when he'll be back..."

"Stop calling me kid!"

"I don't know your name!"

"Well, I don't know yours either!"

"Then why are you yelling at me?"

"You're the one yelling at me!"

"Yeah, because you were yelling!"

"Stop yelling at me!"

"Just tell me your name!"

"It's Strawberry Crepe Cookie!"

"Well, Strawberry Crepe Cookie," They sigh, "This is the dumbest conversation I've ever had."

"You can't just know my name and not tell me yours!!"

"(C/F) Cookie! Stop yelling, he'll come back! Then we'll both be in danger!"

"Why would we be in danger?"

"Because he's an immensely powerful mage."

"...I thought he was just a healer..."

"They teach students a bit of everything at magic school."

"Oh."

"Also the library isn't just full of healing magic books."

"It's not?"

"Of course not. He's a nerd! Every book he can get his hands on he has."

"Fair, but why would that matter?"

"After I saw him blow up half the chapel and gardens, I never underestimated him again."

"H-he did that?"

(C/F) Cookie nods.

"Oh crumbs..." Strawberry Crepe Cookie gapes.

"Do you understand why I'm saying you should get out of here?"

"How angry would he have to be to be able to do that?"

"Please don't get yourself blown to bits."

"... Did that blow up some Cookies?"

"He doesn't know you well enough to care about things like that."

"Touché..."

"Look, you do need to get out of here!" (C/F) Cookie repeats for what feels like the billionth time.

"Fiiiine! But I will be back! Seems a bit overbearing to be stuck with just him for company." Strawberry Crepe Cookie shrugs, "Bye!"

They both hear the door from the library open, barely staying together because of the damage it's sustained.

"Dear, I'm back."

"The back exit should take you out into the courtyard, just look for the trapdoor on the ceiling, or a set of stairs." (C/F) Cookie instructs in a whisper.

"Got it." Strawberry Crepe Cookie nods, and hurries off.

"Dear? What are you doing?" Pure Vanilla Cookie asks them.

"Nothing really. I can't exactly do much with my legs damp."

"I thought I heard shouting..."

"Wasn't me!"

He stares at them, "You've always been a bad liar, but since you're so insistent I'll let it slide this once."

Thank the witches! Even if they eat Cookies, that's divine mercy right there!

Strawberry Crepe Cookie punches open the trapdoor into the courtyard, startling all the Cookies currently in it.

They hadn't realized there would be this many, so they carefully put it back.

Say... couldn't that one Cookie with the crows help in this situation? That seems logical... they'd probably do 700% better with her help in the event Pure Vanilla Cookie attacked them... If she'd help them in that case. Chance of death would probably be 100% if she didn't help them...

Well, never know until you try!

They start looking for her everywhere they can think of, with little success. There are crows everywhere! Yet she's nowhere to be found!

"Hey!" They yell at the little birds, startling them, "Have you seen your Cookie friend? I need to talk to her!"

"What did you do this time?" Her unhappy voice behind them startles Strawberry Crepe Cookie.

How does she do that?

"Nothing! I just need to talk to you!"

"Right, like I'll believe that." She, and the crow always on her arm, are unimpressed.

"Look, I know you don't like me, the feeling of dislike is 100% mutual." Strawberry Crepe Cookie frowns, "Which is why you should believe me because I wouldn't ask you for anything if it wasn't important that you may have mutual interest in knowing."

"Your point?"

"Pure Vanilla Cookie kidnapped (C/F) Cookie."

"I don't believe you."

"Then send one of your crow friends to check the dungeon! I swear I was just talking to them and they told me!"

"The sheer amount of nonsense you say makes me think this is some sort of trap to surprise attack me."

"I would never—"

"Yes, you would."

"How many times have your activities resulted in me messing up my projects, huh? Just look! Then you'll know I'm not lying!"

"Fine."

"Uh, also, don't talk to Pure Vanilla Cookie about that... he'll be angry about me seeing them."

"That doesn't sound like him at all..."

"Neither does kidnapping a Cookie!"

"..." She frowns, "Alright then, fine. We'll talk about this once I know if you're lying."

"Great. I'll just be in the Hangar." Strawberry Crepe Cookie hurries back to their little workspace, trying to figure out what to do next.

14: The Coin Never Landed at All

(C/F) Cookie absentmindedly stares out the little window they had, pondering the life choices that lead them to this moment.
To be fair, it could be worse. But with their legs still a bit soggy, Pure Vanilla Cookie was adamant on having them stay in one spot all the time, while refusing to do anything that would help their legs dry.

It was particularly boring right now, it always was when he left. There was just no point in staring out at the pinkish clouds over the blue sky, with a raisin crow flying— wait.

Raisin Crow?!

They try to stand up, cringing at the sogginess of their legs. They manage to wave the crow over before they have to sit down again.

The small bird sits on the sill of the window and stares at them.

"Can you give Black Raisin Cookie a message for me?" They ask the bird.

It jumps off the edge and flaps down to their arm.

"You can't come rescue me because I don't want Pure Vanilla Cookie to rip the entire kingdom apart—maybe even the forest by the village—looking for me. Also bring me a piece of paper next time you want to talk to me...I can't talk to you birds." (C/F) Cookie thinks for a moment, "I think that's everything..."

The crow caws and seems to salute them with its wing.

"Go." They nod to the bird, which takes flight out the window again.

"...Who am I kidding! If I wrote her anything he'd instantly intercept

it."

Black Raisin Cookie looks up when she hears the loud caw of her crow.

Pure Vanilla Cookie, who she was talking to, looks suspiciously at the bird.
Where had it just come from? Was she still patrolling the forest?

"Not now..." She shakes her head. Whatever news the bird had should wait. The kid had specifically said not in front of Pure Vanilla Cookie... they'd throw a fit if she ignored that.

"It's alright." Pure Vanilla Cookie smiles, "I don't mind."

"No, that can wait. It would involve something I'd need to talk to the child about."

"The child?"

Yes, they both know who "the child" is. Not even the two of them know their name, that's how little they share it.

"Yes, they wanted to talk to me about something."

"What is it?" He asks.

"It's nothing too important." She shrugs, "Knowing them it's probably nonsense."

"I suppose that's true." He smiles, "But do tell me if it's something I should talk to them about."

"I will." She nods. "But back to what you were saying..."

Strawberry Crepe Cookie looks over the Wafflebot they were building. They didn't know what to do with these anymore, since they can't use them to fight Cookies...

"Hey kid."

"WHA—! Oh, it's just you." They look up at the one armed Cookie. "Did you send the bird?"

"Yes. You weren't lying." She looked nervous.

"Ha! See? I'm not as bad as you thought!"

"Yes... but do you not understand what that means..." Black Raisin Cookie frowns, "(C/F) Cookie is caught at the mercy of a powerful Cookie who we can't do anything to defy the will of without getting crumbled ourselves."

"You're incredibly pessimistic." They frown.

"No, I'm being realistic."

"...I know." They admit, sadly, "But it feels wrong that we can't do anything!"

"Well, with the help of my crows we can keep in touch with writing... they suggested that."

"...You can understand those birds?"

"They're smarter than you give them credit for."

"...O...kay then." Strawberry Crepe Cookie nods slowly. "We don't have any sort of plan, so what would we even write to them?"

"Maybe ask if they have a plan." She shrugs.

"How?"

"Do you have any paper?"

"None I'd let you use for this!"

"Then what do you suggest?" She, and her crow, give them an annoyed glare.

"How about another coin toss?" They pull out the coin, "I swear I didn't engineer this one, so don't cheat and have you bird rig the results! Whoever's side it lands on gets to plan our communications

with them."

Black Raisin Cookie rolls her eyes. "I suppose that's fair... as long as you don't use the Wafflebots for a full scale invasion; I don't not want to regret this."

"Fine," Strawberry Crepe Cookie grumbles, "take all the fun out of everything..."

They flip the coin, but the second it's at its peak in the air, Black Raisin Cookie's raisin crow snatched it, flying up to the top of Strawberry Crepe Cookie's project.

"Hey! I told you not to rig it!" They huff

"I... I didn't tell them to do that..." She is confused. Why would the small bird do such a thing?

"Well, I'll just flip it again then!" They cross their arms, "Come on, bring it back!"

But instead the bird flies out the window.

"Hey! That was my only not-engineered coin!" Strawberry Crepe Cookie yells.

"Maybe we just need to work together?" Black Raisin Cookie frowns, "I'm more used to working alone, but... the result of the coin toss was... undecided."

"That wasn't the agreement..."

"Well, we don't exactly have another option..." She points out, "Maybe it will turn out better if we just get along."

"The chances of that happening are less than 1%." They state.

"I'm not going to disagree, but we won't know until we really try." She shrugs.

Pure Vanilla Cookie was looking fondly through the library shelves. These books were so nostalgic to see, but he was mostly here to

stop any nosey Cookies from entering the dungeon. He didn't fully believe (C/F) Cookie about how they hadn't spoken to anyone else since they got there, so it's possible he could catch the culprit when they tried to come back.

A light twittering sound catches his attention and he looks up to see the blueberry bird gliding down to him.

"Hello there." He smiles at the small bird, "Can I help you with something?"

The bird drops a coin in his outstretched hand before fluttering away.

What?

He examines the golden metal more closely, but there is nothing unusual about it. It is just a normal coin with heads and tails. The surface was so shiny that he could see his confusion reflected back at him.
What is this for? Is it some sort of token from the Tree of Wishes in GingerBrave and the rests' Kingdom?

Was it a hint for who had snuck in to speak to his dear?
Well it's a very bad hint then! This could belong to literally any Cookie!

He gently placed it in his pocket, going back to the books.

[I will admit: I'm writing the second to last chapter and this one feels very wrong now... it's one of the ones from before I purged a few and rewrote the ending. Sure, what's in it still works... but it just... doesn't fit well...]

15: Internal Screaming

It's very boring to be left in a cell all the time with nothing to do.

Honestly, how do people in those prison books not die of boredom! No wonder they always can plan elaborate escapes!

(C/F) Cookie groans in annoyance and grabs the pillow Pure Vanilla Cookie had brought them—from his chambers because he can't get into theirs—and throws it across the cell. It doesn't even reach the other wall before it hits the floor. Dang, and that was like 2 steps away...

They frown at the mockery of their strength, but what stung more is that it was just barely out of reach. Their legs were still somewhat soggy, so Pure Vanilla Cookie would probably crumble them if they moved to try and retrieve it; he'd been furious when he examined them last—after they had tried to stand up.

"Greeeaaat!" They drag out the sarcastic cry, feeling more helpless than ever as they lay on the cold, hard floor.

Whatever this was, it had to be classified as torture. Being stuck in a single room, unable to get up or move around, fed like a pet, and the only thing preventing escape being their own physical weakness...
This has to be torture.

But a weight on their chest prompts them to quickly look up, startling the little Raisin Crow.

"Woah! She sent another one..." They offer out a hand to the little bird, who hops onto it nervously, showing them the note in its beak.

"Oh, thanks. Uh, you should probably get out of here... I don't want him to come back unexpectedly and see you."

They don't need to tell the little thing twice. It quickly takes off out the window.

They unfold the page, and stare at the scribbled mess on it.

What.

What?!

Oh!

Tracing over some of the marks, they slowly realize what it is that happened: Black Raisin Cookie and Strawberry Crepe Cookie had clearly been fighting over what to write. Wobbly letters are blotted out by scribbles over them, like the child had grabbed her arm and scratched it out. Then carefully written letters that just suddenly came to a stop and were also scribbled out.

They snicker, imagining the two bickering as they both reached for the quill.
It didn't surprise them at all that the two fight, they have very different views and methods of doing things, but (somewhat) similar goals.

But why send this if it's nothing but a scribbled mess?
Oh! Wait! There's a very small sentence tucked in an otherwise pristine corner! Their hand had been covering it.

"How can we help?"

(C/F) Cookie's mind goes blank at the question. They expected some sort of plan for getting them out, not them asking them for a plan... and not only that, there isn't really a way to communicate any plan to the two of them without him intercepting it...

Maybe...

Yeah... that could work.

16: External Screaming

Pure Vanilla Cookie was reaching his last ounce of patience.

Everyone was still going to him for everything, like he was still the king! He's not! They can decide some of these things themselves! He's tired of getting called away from his dear all the time! He felt like he was slowly going insane because of the little time he was able to spend with them. It was exactly like before the war! ...Just minus the fact that they don't randomly appear and make him feel better throughout the day.

Gosh... that would make this so much more bearable.

Finally—FINALLY—getting a night of peace and quiet, Pure Vanilla Cookie sighs, unable to sleep. He grabs a pillow from the soft bed and hurries down to the dungeons, taking the entrance in the courtyard.

To his surprise, (C/F) Cookie was also still awake.

"Dear?"

"And there goes my quiet evening." They sigh.

"Why are you still awake?" He asks, stepping inside the cell, ignoring their comment about his presence.

"The floor is very uncomfortable."

"That's why I brought you that blanket and..." He sighs, spotting the pillow just out of their reach. He sat down beside it, passing it back to them and sitting with his own pillow hugged against him.

"You couldn't sleep either?" They ask, tossing the pillow across the room, where it lands just past their legs.

"I was worried about you."

"Why?"

"Am I not allowed to be worried about you?"

"...Why would you be worried about me? It's not like I can go anywhere." They rephrase.

He sighs, "I'm sorry dear."

"No you're not!" They scoff.

"I am!" He snaps, then coughs, lowering his voice to a controlled volume. "It's been unbearable to be apart from you..."

"Then let me go!"

He ignores that. "I was hoping that after I gave the kingdom to the village that things could go back to when we traveled together. I take it you remember our pilgrimage."

"So many sheep..." They grimace, "But there you go again, changing the subject... You could've prevented this mess by letting me leave and figure these things out for myself."

Silence.

"I don't know if you'd have come back." He mumbles.

"I would've have to come back to give myself closure about my decision. Not only that, but if you had let me leave, I could've found it in my soul to forgive you for the things you'd done, since you could've done much worse. You know, like this!" (C/F) Cookie shrugs. "You never did anything violent before you dropped me in that lake did you?"

"...No."

"See? Then— Wait. Why was that a hesitant no?"

Silence.

"Pure Vanilla Cookie?" They say expectantly.

"White Lily Cookie got involved before I did anything!" He insists.

"So you thought about it, but didn't actually do anything, right?"

Silence.

"Right?"

More silence.

"You have made me lose all confidence in you."

"I'm trying to remember... I don't think I did..." He explains.

"Your use of "think" is making me nervous." They frown at him.

"I don't want to lie to you... but... I had a lot more outbursts than you heard about..."

"Ah! Now I'm worried." They nod, tensing in fear.

"Dear, just from your posture I can tell you're naturally going to try to run if I go into any specifics. I need you to calm down if you want to keep having this conversation." He says.

"Calm down?!" They snap back, "You're the one who's making me stressed, maybe rather than being vague with your answers you can give me some specifics that don't make me fear the worst!"

He looks around, clearly they didn't realize just how much their voice was echoing around the walls.

"Dear..."

"No, you don't just get to "dear" me!" They snap, "I have every right to be upset about this! Did you ever think to just ask me about things instead of acting rashly?"

"I didn't want to bother you all the time, (C/F) Cookie." His voice is soft as a whisper, "I know how annoying that is." Actually his voice hadn't changed in volume, they were just shouting that loudly.

"I wouldn't have been annoyed! I'd have appreciated you asking

instead of deciding everything for me!" They shout.

"Was I ever wrong with what you'd like?" He asks, still speaking calmly.

"...No." They finally stop yelling. "Not that I remember..."

"Exactly. When I was already pretty certain of the answer I didn't want to bother you and ask." He smiles.

"It would've felt a lot more like you were taking my opinion into consideration..." They grumble.

"I'm sorry it felt like I wasn't." He looks towards the window. "Dear..."

"What?" They ask, trying to sound a lot more calm than they felt. (They really hoped there wasn't a crow out there at that moment. It had taken quite a bit of time for the first to come back for their response, but right now would be a bad time for a reply.)

Obviously that didn't work since he turns to them with wide eyes. He could tell they were scared, but not why. Hopefully. Hopefully he couldn't tell why.

Whatever he was going to say is now lost as he reaches out to them, "(C/F) Cookie—"

They acted before they caught up with reasoning. Almost like what happened at the lake, they weakly tried to stand, but fell on their weakened legs.

"(C/F) Cookie!" He hurries to their side, lifting them gently into his lap. Both pillows now lay discarded on opposite sides of the cell. "Are you ok? Why did you do that? I told you this—." He cuts himself off, recognizing the lack of need for an 'I told you so.'

"Ow." They reach up for the pain in their head, but his hand met them on the way up and he held it away.

"I..." He sighs, "Dear, if I heal you, you better promise me you're not going to try to lift the bars.

"I'm not that stupid." They frown at him.

"(C/F) Cookie. Promise me."

"I promise I'm not that dumb."

"I could just leave you like this; you'd probably die."

"You wouldn't be able to live with yourself if you did that." They counter.

"Then would you rather I heal just enough to save you, but leave the rest of you in pain."

"N-no."

"Then promise me you won't try to lift the bars."

"I-I promise."

"Promise to what?"

"I promise I won't try to lift the bars."

"Good."

(C/F) Cookie feels him healing them. They must've really hurt themself on the fall for it to take as long as it did... or he was purposefully dragging it out to take longer.
They wouldn't put that past him.

"There." He smiles, squeezing their hand gently.
If they didn't remember that they were in the dungeon, and at his mercy, it would've felt like the loving smile he always had when he saw them before the war.

"I'll fetch the pillows for you. Don't move too fast, you'll still probably be a bit lightheaded." He set them down.

They sigh, feeling even worse than their prison normally made them feel.
"Crumbs..." They bury their face in their hands as they mumble,

"What are both of us thinking?"

17: Hidden Agenda

Both Black Raisin Cookie and Strawberry Crepe Cookie were confused by the reply they got back.

All of it, aside from the postscript, seemed like total nonsense that was supposed to throw them off trying to help. It said something like:

"It's wonderful here" yada yada "I don't know what you're talking about" blah blah blah "I will return when I have cleared my doubts."

"P.S. Strawberry Crepe Cookie, trust Black Raisin Cookie on this."

"What?" Strawberry Crepe Cookie squints at the page, trying to make out some sort of code. Unfortunately, there isn't one.

"Obviously it was written with the idea that it may be intercepted," Black Raisin Cookie reasons, "To pretend we're in the dark of what's going on in case he got to the crow before they got to us. Any code they may have he could figure out."

"But what is this postscript about then?" They ask, gesturing to it.

"Caw!"

"Oh?" She looks at the messengers, "That was a smart idea."

"What?"

"(C/F) Cookie told their actual plan to the crow, so I would get it and be able to pass it to you, but there was no way he'd know that."

"So what's the actual plan?"

"Hush. There are footsteps approaching." Black Raisin Cookie jumps to a darker part of the Hanger, effectively disappearing from sight.

"Child?" Pure Vanilla Cookie calls as he opens the door.

"Ugh." Strawberry Crepe Cookie groans, "What do you want?"

"Oh, nothing! I just wanted to know where you are!"

"Why?" They say, utterly confused. Was he onto them?

"Because it gives me some peace of mind to know that you and Black Raisin Cookie aren't off causing trouble somewhere."

"Get out." The child says, flipping a lever on their current project, like they were going back to work.

"Alright, if you insist." Pure Vanilla Cookie leaves the Hangar again, closing the door behind him.

Strawberry Crepe Cookie looks at the door suspiciously, then uses his waffle arms to make sure it was shut all the way.

"Good, he's gone." Black Raisin Cookie jumps back to where the two were conversing before. "Here's the actual plan."

"Are you sure he's gone? Maybe he's onto us."

"He would've insisted upon staying if he was." She points out, "Do you want to hear the plan or not?"

"Touché... but are we absolutely certain he's gone?"

Silence.

"Yes." Black Raisin Cookie nods, "I cannot hear him by the door."

"Alright, what is the plan?"

"One of us, probably you, is going to be in charge of causing a scene and then running off to the dungeons to help them get to their bedroom. The other is going to babysit the problem the other caused and ensure Pure Vanilla Cookie doesn't catch on to what we're doing and head back to the castle."

"Hmm, yeah. That would have a higher chance of success if I'm the one who goes to get them, I remember where their cell is and he

trusts you more than he trusts me." Strawberry Crepe Cookie nods, "I'd say the percentage of failure is still about 31% either way... If he realizes what's going on..."

"I'm glad we're on the same page with the possibility of failure." Black Raisin Cookie nods. Sadly looking at her crow, she sighs, "How do we plan for if he figures it out?"

"I guess we hope he doesn't." They shrug, "Why would they want to get up to their room though? That seems like the first place he'd look..."

"Perhaps there is an escape there..." She suggests, "But in the event that I'd fail, I'll send you a crow. If you see it, tell them to run as fast as they can to anywhere they can get away from him."

"Alright... I'll need a bit of time to set up a diversion large enough to hold his attention for long enough...."

"We'll also need to figure out how to communicate when we go through to them." Black Raisin Cookie nods.

"Simple, we write a completely normal sentence with the time and mark it or something."

"How much time do you think you'd need?"

"Hmm... Well, maybe I could rebuild the Golem... have it cause chaos."

"I will crumble you myself if any of the villagers get hurt." She threatens.

"Hmm, but if we claim it's an unruly Wafflebot, and Cookies get hurt, he'll not only have to stay to ensure its destruction, but he'll also have to take care of the injured." Strawberry Crepe Cookie points out.

"You won't need that much time." She counters.

"I can't magic-proof the bots, that's not a thing I can do." They roll their eyes, "One spell would probably have them in pieces."

"I see. There's no way for you to effectively cause a purposeful malfunction... maybe instead..." She begins to explain her plan.

"Hmm, yeah, maybe." Strawberry Crepe Cookie shrugs, "But what about the chance that fails..."

"The same signal."

"Hmm... ok!" They smile widely.

(C/F) Cookie paces around the cell. It isn't much different than sitting all the time, but after days of being stuck on the floor, they never wanted to sit down again.

They stop and look out the window. The scenery of soft, pink clouds mixed with blue sky had gotten boring a while ago. Honestly, what did he expect them to do when they were stuck down here without him?

... he probably didn't expect to be apart from them often enough that they would be bored all the time.

What is that...?

A black dot in the distance was quickly getting closer and closer...

Oh wait! That's a raisin crow!

(C/F) Cookie moves away from the window to give the bird space to land—while not hitting them in the face.

The crow had no letter. It was just a messenger.

"They got the message." They breathe out a sigh.

"Caw!" The bird flew off quickly. Good timing too because not a moment later they heard Pure Vanilla Cookie calling for them down the hall.

"Dear! I'm back!"

"Uh, hey Vanilla!" They chuckle nervously.

Maybe things are going to turn in their favor.

18: A Way Out

(C/F) Cookie hopes Black Raisin Cookie and Strawberry Crepe Cookie didn't need their help with the rest of the planning.

Initially, they had considered trying to guilt trip Pure Vanilla Cookie into letting them go, but they didn't know how long that would take, so this seems like a better option... but if it fails... they just had to hope it doesn't. White Lily Cookie's seal over their bedroom door had to be enough of a barrier to get him to listen.

They just have to have faith that the two Cookies can come up with a good enough way to draw him away.

Obviously he could tell something was up, he had commented on how they seemed antsy at least three times in the past day alone, but they couldn't help it. Waiting is the worst.

"Dear, are you alright?" He asks, drawing them out of their zoned out thoughts.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"You certainly seem like you've been sleeping better." He jokes.

They roll their eyes. That was practically a comment on how he was coming to see them every night.
After he had healed them he was obviously making more of an effort to not assume things, and make them comfortable—note that they hadn't asked to leave since then because they were afraid of their plan being discovered or him to backslide and break their legs. The plan would not work if they couldn't run.

"You've practically dragged everything but the mattress down here now." They snicker.

"Well... do you want me to bring it down here?"

"A tempting offer, but no. I'd rather have mine."

"I can't get in there, I already tried." Pure Vanilla Cookie frowns.

"I know." They nod.

"Oh, tomorrow the child is going to be showing us some of the things they've done with the Wafflebots and the Hangar now that they aren't using them to attack the village."

"Oh, cool."

Wait—

"Yes, I'm rather glad they're expanding the capability of the bots for more than just violence." He grins.

"From what I know of them, there's probably still some combat-based features."

He laughs, "That is true. But that child must be brilliant to be able to do alone what it took an entire team of engineers."

"You'll have to tell me about it." They grin, knowing that after tomorrow they could probably ask Strawberry Crepe Cookie themself.

"I certainly will, I hope they haven't tried to remove the failsafe..."

"It's practically pointless now anyway." They shrug.

"Yes, I suppose that's true..." He frowns.

They didn't expect him to go silent.

"(C/F) Cookie..." He looks up at the ceiling, speaking quietly, "Do you hate me?"

Hate is a strong word. They have every right to be furious and never forgive him. But they also know him well enough to know that he really does mean well and want everyone to be happy. He's just not very good at understanding what will make them happy specifically. If—No, once they get out of here, they'd have to see if he's willing to listen to them before they can really decide that.

...Knowing themself, they'd have come back to him after thinking this through. Not like they have anywhere else to go.

"...You need to prove to me just how much I should hate you: whether that be a lot or if I even should." They respond.

He clearly wasn't expecting that.
"But I trapped you down here, I nearly drowned you, I've lied to you so much, and... I've scared you more than anyone." He lists, "You have every right to hate me."

"Yeah, but that's just when you look at the bad. You've stopped yourself from going too far; you heal others when you overreact and hurt someone... usually; you still are obviously totally in love with me; and you're trying to make this better—even if you're not doing that good of a job."

"I... I just need your help to do better." He says.

They scan his remorse-filled face.
He was really saying what he thinks.

"You know exactly what it is you need to do." They shake their head.

He sighs in defeat, "I... I'll be back later." He lifts the bars easily and leaves.

(C/F) Cookie glances at the window and not a second later a small, familiar crow hops into view, note in beak.
They sputter and whisper (just in case he could still hear them), "How long were you sitting there?"

They get no answer. Instead it just drops the note in their hands and takes off.

They open the note, which is carefully written this time around—the penmanship is a bit shaky in a few places, implying it was probably Black Raisin Cookie's.

"Tomorrow."

Yep, definitely Black Raisin Cookie, no one else is that straight to the point...
Strawberry Crepe Cookie would've written some elaborate code to convey the same information.

Now to dispose of it... just in case. They fold it up into a neat little paper plane and toss it out the window, watching it fall straight to the ground below.

Excellent.

...

They frown. Now the anticipation is going to make them even more nervous...
No! They can't think that way. What if he comes back?

It was a bit odd when he didn't come back, aside from coming to feed them—which he seemed in a hurry to do and then leave.

The same thing happens in the morning.

Did he really feel that guilty?

Well! No time to concern themself with it, a rescue is coming!

It was pretty late in the afternoon already... they are starting to get a bit nervous that he found them out before they even started...

"(C/F) Cookie!" Black Raisin Cookie yells, the doors to the dungeon from the library finally giving way and collapsing again.

"I'm here!" They yell back.

She hurries to their cell, half hidden in the dark cavern, "Strawberry Crepe Cookie had everyone go back to the village for their demonstration, so we have a bit of extra time to go." She starts to lift the bars, but it's obviously imbalancing her. She manages to lift it about half their height, and they take a running start and slide out of the cell.

"Are you ok?" They ask her as she drops the metal.

"That's certainly heavier than it looks." She examines her arm, "But I'm fine. Let's go."

(C/F) Cookie grabs her cloak—as to help her keep up and not strain her arm further—and starts sprinting towards the light.
"Man, it feels great to be running again." They shake their head.

"We don't have the time to slow down," She reminds them, "you need to lead the way and I'll keep watch."

They nod and sprint off again. If they could've taken the exit in the courtyard, this would go faster, but now is not the time to complain.

Why do the stairs need to be close to the entrance?

"Do you know the way?" Black Raisin Cookie asks as they near the palace entrance.

"Up the stairs." They answer, then almost trip on the steps, for a crow to catch them and carry them the rest of the way up the steps.
"T-thanks." They mumble to the bird as Black Raisin Cookie joins them on the landing.

"No time to stop." She reminds them, grabbing their hand and continuing down the hall.

They heard inaudible yells echoing from the floor below.

"Crumbs."

"Go! Run! As fast as you can! You have no time to stop." Black Raisin Cookie shoves them onward, "I'll try to distract him."

"Yeah, that's not gonna work..." They mumble as they go full speed down the hallway, grateful for once that there are no more stairs. They nearly passed the door and had to grab the handle to stop enough to turn around and open it. They rush inside and slam the door with adrenaline.

The room looks exactly as they left it.

They draw back the curtains for more light, staring out the beautiful window.

"(C/F) Cookie!" Pure Vanilla Cookie knocks on the door, "Please open the door..."

They stare at it, glad they had almost an entire minute to spare before he got there. "No." They hadn't doubted their answer, but they were tempted to just not respond.

"Dear... please..." He sounds like he's going to cry. "Open the door."

"No." They repeat, they pretend to think about it, not that he could see, "I don't think I will."

"Dear please!" Oh, he is crying. "I'm sorry! I'm so sorry..." he continues to mutter apologies.

"You weren't sorry enough to let me go." They shrug, turning back to the window, "I'll talk to you when I want to. I won't let you in until then."

Clearly his resolve to keep them imprisoned forever has totally shattered.
As it should!
But now they had practically traded one prison for another. One that protects them? Sure! One that has all their stuff? Also true! But this room is still a prison. At least now they could actually see out the window.

They aren't sure how long it is until there's a chorus of knocks on the door followed by a familiar child's voice yelling "HEEEEEEEEEEEY! It's us! Let us in!"

They snort at the introduction, "And if I don't?"

"I'll smash the door!"

They burst out laughing as they make their way over and open the door.

Strawberry Crepe Cookie immediately pushes past them with a

"Finally!" and flops onto their bed.

"Hello (C/F) Cookie." Black Raisin Cookie smiles slightly.

"Come in." They move out of her way, "It seems like someone has already made themself at home." They snicker, staring at the child who's lying face-down on their bed.

"Hey! It's a comfy bed!" The child sits up to argue.

"I never said it's not." They laugh.

"Yeah... well... whatever!" Strawberry Crepe Cookie flops back down.

"I'm still amazed at how easily the plan worked." Black Raisin Cookie cuts in.

"It only worked because of you two." (C/F) Cookie shrugs. "Strawberry Crepe Cookie, how did he realize I had escaped?"

"Well," The Cookie in question sits up, straightening their appearance with their waffle arms, "he looked up at the castle, probably able to tell something was happening, and went running back to the portal. I have never seen someone run so slowly..."

Both they and (C/F) Cookie laugh at that last comment.

"If he was any faster we probably would have failed..." Black Raisin Cookie adds.

Both stop laughing.

"What do you think he would've done if he caught up?" Strawberry Crepe Cookie asks.

"Probably would've blown up half the castle." (C/F) Cookie grimaces. "But let's not think about what-ifs because they didn't happen!"

"Yeah." The child agrees.

"I suppose... but what now?" She asks.

"(C/F) Cookie can't really leave the room without him swarming them..." Strawberry Crepe Cookie thinks aloud.

"No... I get the feeling he won't. He'll probably wait for me to come talk to him." They shake their head, "We've been talking about boundaries... Plus I really want to go for a run..."

"I'll race you!" The small Cookie hops up onto their feet.

"You're going to lose that race." The one-armed Cookie adds.

"Not if I leave right this second!" They go shooting towards the door, then stop, "Wait, where are we racing to?"

That finally gets Black Raisin Cookie to snicker with (C/F) Cookie bursting into laughter.

They walk over to the child, trying to stop laughing, lay a hand on their shoulder, the other on the doorknob. "The edge of town. Bye!" They open the door and going sprinting out.

"Hey! Wait! That's unfair!" The child hurries to catch up.

Black Raisin Cookie rolls her eyes, shaking her head as her little crow goes flying off after too. She follows at a slow place, closing the door behind her.

19: Truth

It was getting a bit obvious to every Cookie that (C/F) Cookie and Pure Vanilla Cookie are avoiding each other.

Pure Vanilla Cookie at least has a reason, he had told Black Raisin Cookie that he was waiting for them to talk to him, but for (C/F) Cookie... They just laughed awkwardly and changed the subject every time anyone asked when they are going to talk to him.

"You're being ridiculous over nothing!" Strawberry Crepe Cookie says to them, "He's willing to listen to you on this now!"

"Eh heh heh..." (C/F) Cookie glances around the Hangar, "What are those?"

"Stop changing the subject!" The child throws a broken waffle sword at them, "Why don't you want to talk to him?"

They groan, having dodged the now even more broken sword, "It's going to be embarrassing..."

"Of course it is!" Strawberry Crepe Cookie snorts, "But do you really want to test his patience with you?"

(C/F) Cookie grumbles, burying their face in their hands.

"His anticipation is practically becoming his entire being! If you don't act soon I may have to add it to his ingredient list!"

"...Do you have one of those for everyone?"

"Yeah, Cookies ask to see theirs all the time! Hey! No changing the subject!"

"Fine..." (C/F) Cookie grumbles, "I just... haven't decided what to say..."

"Not my problem." The kid starts messing with their equipment.

"Yeah... but what am I supposed to say! This isn't a very common situation!" They exclaim.

"Well, why don't you start by just telling me how you feel about him?" Strawberry Crepe Cookie doesn't look up from their project.

"Well..." They think, "I am mad at him for not respecting my decision to leave and locking me in prison... but he probably would've let me go soon anyway..." They pause, thinking hard.

"Uh huh..."

"I'm also still upset with him lying so much to cover up his outright obsession with me." They frown, "He threatened a few and got pretty angry at other Cookies for their interactions with me. But at the same time... now that I know we're making progress on setting boundaries, and he's worked hard to never ensure he never crumbles someone..." They sigh, "But he's still lied to me so much... and I was happier than ever without him. But he was always there for me, not like anyone else... and... I know it will definitely take communication and work to have anything like what we've had before..."

"Yeah..."

"You're not listening..." They add, looking up at Strawberry Crepe Cookie fiddling with their stuff.

"Yep."

"I'm going to go..." They shake their head, making their way towards the door.

"Are you gonna go talk to him?"

"Not right now..."

"You better do it soon!" Strawberry Crepe Cookie insists.

"I will." They frown, opening the door, "See you later..." They leave, waving hello to the villagers they pass on their way back to the castle.

Walking when they're upset is still their habit, one they had never managed to break. It just gives them more time to think, while not making them worry about being too lost in thought and falling over due to the weight of their problem.

"Hey, (C/F) Cookie... are you ok?" A villager Cookie–whose name they weren't quite certain of because of just how many villagers there are–asks.

They finally heave a sigh and plop onto a nearby bench (their feet might have been autopiloting them to it because they knew the likelihood that Pure Vanilla Cookie is in the castle hiding from them is pretty high and they didn't want to accidentally run into him). "No."

"What's wrong?" The villager sits beside them.

"I, uh... I am trying to ignore a problem in hopes it will go away." They confess.

"Why?" The Cookie asks them, "Wouldn't it be better to just deal with it?"

"Yeah... but... I just don't want to talk to him..." (C/F) Cookie frowns, looking at their feet.

"Well... I don't know if it's any help, but Pure Vanilla Cookie told us that it's better to talk to a Cookie you're having a problem with." The villager fumbles with their cloak.

"See, that's the problem... Uh, it's sort of with him, and the two of us aren't really on speaking terms..."

"Why don't you want to talk to him?"

"I don't know what to say..."

"Isn't it better to forgive and work through problems?"

"Some of the things he's done are very serious." (C/F) Cookie shudders.

"Well, if I know anything about Pure Vanilla Cookie—and I definitely don't know him as well as you—he means well. He'd never purposefully hurt your feelings and, if he did, he'd try to make it up to you."

"Well, yeah, but how do I know he won't just lie again?" They frown, "I mean, he lied to your whole village on who he was for moons! He essentially betrayed you all by leaving you behind!"

"But he helped us when we were hurt, and he gave us this place to live and become the Cookies we want to be. No Cookie is perfect, so we need to recognize the mistakes of others–and ourselves–and try to help make things better."

"That... That really helps me feel better about all this. Thanks." (C/F) Cookie smiles.

"Isn't that what Cookies are supposed to do? Help each other?" The villager smiles as well, "Take care of yourself, I hope you get that sorted out."

"Bye." They wave as the Cookie stands up and walks away.
They take a deep breath and sigh, "Ok. This isn't going to go away... Just make it fast and regret it afterwards." They stand up, hurrying over to the castle.

Pure Vanilla Cookie flips through the pages of a book he's already read about fifty-thousand times (well, probably not, but the fact that he can read a few words, then remember word-for-word what the rest of the page says definitely means he's read it a few too many times). Usually the gardens help him feel better, but now they just feel awful to sit in.
He had set his staff down just out of the way and was sitting on the steps of the little pavilion in view of the little pond.
Honestly he deserved to feel miserable. Not even the books or the flowers could take his mind of just how guilty he felt. He was honestly just waiting for (C/F) Cookie to come confirm all the things he already knows they'll say and ask him to remove his tracking spell–of course, he'd have to get a different book to do that which is a book he's been avoiding reading since he really doesn't want them to go. But looking at all the ways he's hurt them, there

was no doubt they'd want to leave.

"Vaaanniiillllllaaaa!!!!!"

He'd been so caught up in his misery that he didn't even realize they were approaching.
"Oh, hello (C/F) Cookie."

"I..." They stop to breathe, winded from yelling, "I do not know why I thought you'd be anywhere but here."

He doesn't say anything. It's not like he really has a right to say anything to them.

"Ok, uh..." They start mumbling, "How do I start..."

"It... It's ok. I can just remove the tracking spell and let you leave. You don't need to say anything." He sighs, closing the book he wasn't reading.

"What? That's not what I... Wait, you can do that?!"

"Well, yeah, it's a pretty basic spell, like most others it has a–" Then he processes what they just said, "Wait, what...?"

"Yeah, this conversation has gone in a direction I didn't expect it to..." They grimace, "Um..."

"Y-you're not leaving?"

"Where would I go?" They laugh awkwardly, "I... don't know what state the others' kingdoms are in, let alone what my situation would be if I went there; I don't really want to go to GingerBrave's kingdom... they're definitely better travel companions than neighbors; you're not going to throw me in prison again..."

"O-of course I wouldn't!" He agrees, noticing their expectant stare.

"So, why would I leave?" They shrug, "I've lived here since we built this place."

"I just thought..." Pure Vanilla Cookie looks at the book in his

hands.

"That I wouldn't want to see you again?" (C/F) Cookie finishes for him. "Yeah, that's not entirely wrong–you've definitely got a lot of work to do to make a lot of things up to me–but once again, where would I go?"

"But... why stay?"

"I've lived here since... an eternity ago, I have friends here, and... you definitely will make it up to me."

"How do I start?" He asks, standing up.

"Uh... I did... not expect to get that question." They chuckle nervously.

"Hmm... then let me start with an apology." He sets the book down and takes their hand in both of his, "(C/F) Cookie, I really am sorry for all the horrible things I've done to you... I shouldn't have forced you into this, I shouldn't have treated you like some helpless child, I shouldn't have forcibly locked you away... twice... and I don't understand how you've found it in your soul to forgive me. I'm a pathetic Cookie for hurting you in these ways. I should never have used my love for you as an excuse to do all the things I have."

"Well, do you still love me?" They ask, trying to hide just how embarrassed him holding their hands like that made them feel.

He smiles, moving their hand and gently pressing a kiss to it, "With all my heart."

Epilogue

Normal is a general term. It describes the way things are usually done. Normality isn't ever going to cover any one thing perfectly, it's just the expected outcome.

Trying is a better word for everything. Something may not turn out as planned, but as long as the intention of one is to fix whatever harm their actions may have caused, then what more can we expect of them?

It had been a few days (at least, no one was really keeping track anymore) and while things might not be "normal" it was likely they never would be.

The Vanilla Kingdom was being put back together—not because of a powerful ruler guiding their way, but because everyone was willing to try.
Things may not be the way they were, but they were trying to exceed what they were before.

Black Raisin Cookie and Strawberry Crepe Cookie weren't constantly fighting anymore... physically at least. Their personalities made verbal fights impossible to avoid (usually in the form of Strawberry Crepe Cookie throwing a tantrum).

As for Pure Vanilla Cookie... he was... adjusting. When one thing is a certain way for a long time, it's important to take the steps needed to ensure the problem doesn't return, and he's doing just that.
He's by no means perfect, but he hasn't acted irrationally... or exploded in rage at anyone. He also let Strawberry Crepe Cookie use the Wafflebots to rip apart the dungeon "for science." (Everyone who knows what he did knows that was not really why... they also know that that is why he and (C/F) Cookie are not saying they're lovers anymore.)

(C/F) Cookie knocks on the door to Pure Vanilla Cookie's chambers.

"Come in."

They push open the door and find him sitting at his desk.

"Oh! Hello (C/F) Cookie." He smiles at them.

"Hi... what are you doing?" They walk over and peer over his shoulder.

"Oh! I'm just finally writing letters to all our friends! This one specifically is for Hollyberry Cookie." Pure Vanilla Cookie smiles, pausing in his writing.

"Oh?" They scan over what he's written before grabbing the quill in his hand.

"Yes, I still have a responsibility to them as— uh, what are you...?"

He watches as they stick a little postscript in the bottom corner: "P.S. be sure to tell Royal Berry Cookie and Jungleberry Cookie hi for us!"

"Haha!" He takes the quill they were handing back to him, "That's really all you wanted to say?"

"Yes." They nod, holding in a laugh. "Don't you remember how I teased them to no end, and then they got married... and it really turned the tables on who could tease who..."

"I do." Pure Vanilla Cookie snickers, remembering (C/F) Cookie's face at their wedding party on the occasion. "I had never seen that boy with a face that looked so much like his mother's."

"That's because her default is a smug grin." They finally let out a small laugh.

"I suppose that is true." He smiles softly, "Did you need something?"

"Hmm, no." They shrug, "I just wanted to see what you were doing?"

"Well... Do you want to help me write these? It could be more fun than just sitting here in silence."

"Hmm... I doubt Dark Cacao Cookie would appreciate all the sarcastic comments I would have you write." They sit down on his bed.

"I'd appreciate them." He laughs.

"Hmm... alright then."

"Then who shall we start with? I'm eager to hear what it is you want to say."

[Thanks everyone. It's been fun. I will now only write wholesome Pure Vanilla Cookie fics because it doesn't seem like there are many of those...

I do have a few random oneshots for him I wrote before I actually started this story! (That was like... December, I think? I had the prologue oneshot sitting around for like a week before I kept going...) Half of them are not great! {I may post them to my oneshot book for criticism and just to show how my writing of him has changed}
Shove enough ideas and pressure on me and I'll write and another one of these (not a sequel!!! That's unneeded!) because I think I'd be willing to suffer through Google Docs crashing every time I accidentally rotate my phone for another Pure Vanilla story.]